A Kind of Superior Hobby:

Women Managers in the John Lewis Partnership 1918-1950

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ABSTRACT

During the interwar period, a radical departure from earlier traditional management practices in British department stores can be identified. Increasing trade, combined with the introduction of new systems and stock, required a dramatic increase in the number and calibre of managers employed to run the shops. Using a case study approach, this thesis will identify the reasons for the implementation of a new recruitment and employment strategy. For the John Lewis Partnership, it considers how this translated into jobs and opportunities for middle-class educated women, a group of workers whose experience of the work place has previously received little academic attention. It assesses the contribution the women made to the overall development of the company. Addressing the social and practical issues which surrounded their employment, with specific reference to staff turnover, pay and conditions, the thesis considers how these recruits were perceived by their employer, their peers and by themselves. It presents a group of workers who entered and often left the workplace after achieving levels of managerial status. It identifies the influence these women were able to exert on their employers, creating and retaining their position within specialist fields of employment and dominating the middle management of the John Lewis Partnership during the period 1918 - 1950.

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Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used throughout this thesis:

JLP	John Lewis Partnership
JSL	John Spedan Lewis
SBML	Sarah Beatrice Mary Lewis (neé Hunter), wife of John Spedan Lewis
SPS	Selfridge Provincial Stores Group
WEF	Women's Employment Federation
John Lewis	John Lewis Oxford Street Ltd. First Shop opened by John Lewis at 132 Oxford Street, London, in 1864, and was the headquarters of the organisation. A second shop adjacent to the original one was acquired in 1928. The former shop became know as John Lewis West House and latter as John Lewis East House. The West House was destroyed in 1940 and the East House was damaged but trade continued there until 1960.
Peter Jones	Peter Jones Ltd. Shop on the Kings Road, Chelsea, West London, purchased by John Lewis in 1905 and where John Spedan Lewis began his experimental organisational changes in 1914.

Glossary

Definition of terms used throughout this thesis:

Assistant Buyer	Junior management role assisting the buyer with administrative tasks. This role was often given to educated women who had completed their training but were considered to require more experience before becoming a buyer and deputised to the buyer in their absence
Buyer	Senior members of staff responsible for the buying and pricing of specific ranges of stock and the running of departments. After 1918 buyers became responsible for the purchase of stock only and the organisation of departments was allocated to other managers.
Buyer's Friend / Secretary	Junior manager, often a trainee, who undertook administrative tasks on behalf of the buyer
Chief Assistant	Senior member of each department who took over day to day running of departments after the restructuring of the role of buyer in 1918
Chief Registrar	Educated woman of Director status, with a seat on the Central Board, responsible for the democratic bodies and systems operated by the JLP
Chief Staff Advisor	Manager responsible for running the Staff Advice Department which undertook the recruitment and training of staff after 1929
Committee for Administration	Senior management committee set up in 1936 to assess the administrative functions of the company
Committee for Claims	Committee of elected members of staff who allocated funds, donated by management, to staff in financial hardship

Company Census	Census of staff carried out annually in the interwar period and listed in *The Gazette.* Gives details of name, length of service, department and store for every employee and compiled by Department of Staff Advice
Contingency Department	Department operating in Harrods in which staff were allocated to specific areas in the shop with acute staffing requirements and to which many management trainees were allocated. A similar department in Selfridges was known as the "Flying Squad".
Department of Financial Advice	Department created in 1930s to co-ordinate training schemes, monitor recruits and allocate staff to branches across the country
Department of Merchandise Advice	Department created to support buyers by collecting information on stock levels, prices and turnover
Department of Staff Advice	Department created in 1929 to recruit, train and monitor staff. Centrally based but with local staff advisors in each branch
Director of Establishment	Manager responsible for the recruitment of staff in the years before the management re-organisation post 1918. Post later became Chief Staff Advisor
Divisional Manager	Managers with responsibility for control of a group of departments within a store
General Manager	Senior manager in branch with overall control of operational issues
Goodwill Director	Manager responsible for customer relations
Intelligence Department	Department created in 1926 to locate and analyse pricing of stock by competitors to support the "Never Knowingly Undersold" slogan
Intermittent Partners	Staff (usually with domestic responsibilities), recruited on flexible contracts which allowed them to work at specific times of the year or for a given period

Learner	Management trainee recruited on the Learnership Scheme which was created to attract educated middle class recruits who could be fast tracked through to management positions
Learnership Scheme	Formal management training scheme introduced in 1918
Matron	Female manager responsible for the staff hostels and general staff welfare issues until the introduction of Registrars in 1938
Merchandise Manager	Management position replacing that of Stock Controller, responsible for administrative stock control and value testing
Partnership's Constitution	System of company governance based on JSL's ideas of profit sharing. Formal ratification of the Constitution confirmed in the Trust Settlements signed in 1929 and 1950.
Personal Connection Scheme	Commission scheme which benefited members of staff whose family and friends shopped in store
Premiére Vendeuse	Woman with high class sales techniques and contacts
Promotion and Transfer Section	Section of the Staff Advice department responsible for internal promotion and transfer
Registrar	Senior manager, always a women, responsible for the maintenance, understanding and development of the Partnership Constitution and later welfare issues
Registry	Department in each branch, managed by Registrar and responsible for all matters relating to the Partnership's constitution, governance and welfare of staff
Section Manager	Junior management position

Staff Council	Democratic body set up in 1918 with elected representatives from each department, chaired by JSL, to discuss matters of relevance to the business
Staff Manager / Advisor	Manager responsible for recruitment of staff
Staff Secretary	Administrative role relating to the recruitment of staff in the period up to the creation of the Department of Staff Advice in 1929
Staff Trainer	Manager (usually female) responsible for the delivery of in-house staff training in each branch
Stock Controller	Administrative management role responsibly for monitoring stock levels, prices and turnover
Superintendent	Junior management position responsible for day to day running of section within a department. Role replaced that of Chief Assistant
The Conference	Group of senior managers, at director level, who reported directly to JSL and who comprised some members of the Board
Warden	Manager responsible for the maintenance, understanding and development of the Partnership Constitution and welfare issues until the introduction of Registrars in 1938

INTRODUCTION

'The woman boss is a matter for comic pictures and music-hall jokes and sly banter'.[1] This contemporary assessment of women managers makes it difficult to understand why women entered retail management during the interwar period. The place of educated women in the interwar employment market was complex[2] and, to date, this large group of workers has received little investigation.[3] There were positive aspects to retail work, such as growing opportunities for skilled managerial labour, no marriage bar and the introduction of new working practices and systems.[4] However, many women in department stores were faced with popular attitudes which saw them classed alongside shop assistants, who continued to suffer from low wages, poor job security and long hours.[5]

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[1] Winifred Holtby on the continuing inequality of women in managerial positions in the 1920s in Holtby, W., 'The Man Colleague' in Berry, P. and Bishop, A., (eds.), *Testament of a Generation: The Journalism of Vera Brittain and Winifred Holtby,* London, Virago, 1985, p62.

[2] Educated women are included in figures calculated by Beddoe, which confirm that by 1921 the female participation rate in the workforce was 2% lower than for 1911. However, Roberts states that, by 1931, the number of women in retailing had increased to over 544,000, see Roberts, E., *Women's Work 1840-1940,* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995, p27; Beddoe, D., *Back To Home and Duty, Women Between the Wars 1918 – 1939,* London, Pandora, 1989, p48.

[3] This view is supported in Bradley, H., *Men's Work, Women's Work,* Cambridge, Polity Press, 1989; Hoffman, P., *They Also Serve: The Story of the Shopworker,* London, Porcupine Press, 1947.

[4] Lancaster, B., *The Department Store: A Social History,* Leicester, Leicester University Press, 1995, p138.

[5] Beddoe, *Back to Home and Duty,* p70.

Historiography of Women's Employment in the Retail Industry

An exploration of the employment of women in department store management during the inter war period requires research across the fields of retail and gender history. Anderson and Zimmeck, respectively, have explored the development of clerical and professional employment opportunities for women.[6] However, there is little detailed research into retail management structures, which hampers a comprehensive understanding of a large section of the female managerial workforce, which this study will seek to rectify.

Despite low pay and the lack of career structure highlighted by Holcombe, Adburgham, Roberts and Lancaster,[7] shop work in department stores had provided employment for girls from the working class to professional families since the growth of this type of establishment in the 19th century. As such it was a rare example of the diversity of class groups working alongside each other within one industry. Holcombe concluded that the industry recruited 'from every stratum of society … the daughters of artisans, of agricultural labourers, of skilled mechanics, of struggling and of prosperous shopkeepers, of clerks and of professional men'.[8] Her acknowledgement of the variety of class, age and academic achievement to be found within the ranks of female retail workers is rare in

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[6] Anderson, G., (ed.), *The White Blouse Revolution: Women Clerical Workers Since 1870*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1988; Zimmeck, M., 'Jobs For the Girls: The Expansion of Clerical Work for Women 1850-1914', in John, A., (ed.), *Unequal Opportunities: Women's Employment in England 1800-1918*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1986, ps35-48.

[7] Holcombe, L., *Victorian Ladies At Work: Middle-Class Working Women in England and Wales 1850-1914*, Hampden, Archon Press, 1973; Adburgham, A., *Shops and Shopping 1800-1914: Where And In What Manner The Well Dressed Englishwoman Bought Her Clothes*, London, Barrie and Jenkins, 1989; Roberts, *Women's Work*; Lancaster, *The Department Store.*

[8] Holcombe, *Victorian Ladies at Work*, p117.

work on this industry, and acknowledges the complex composition of retail employment in the early 20th century. The final group of women she identifies, those who came from professional middle-class families, have previously been included with their working-class colleagues in examinations of the industry. However, their experience of the workplace cannot be assumed to match that of their working-class peers and this thesis will explore both the differences and similarities.

This thesis will consider whether educated women found the opportunities offered in retail management a positive experience, allowing them to demonstrate their educational and interpersonal skills, or whether there was a lack of promotion and development in an environment which combined restrictive practices and a paternalistic environment.

Previous academic research using source material obtained from the archives of other department stores has produced overviews of the industry in both the 19th and 20th centuries.[9] Most notably, women's shop floor employment in retailing has been explored in the work of Lancaster, Porter Benson, Cushman, Miller and Briggs.[10] These historians provide an analysis of differing aspects of women's work in department stores. However, Lancaster, in his social history of department stores, *The Department Store: A Social History*, confirms that, 'The labour history of the department store in Britain is virgin territory',[11] suggesting there remain areas of retail labour history which require

[9] A key text on British retail history is Jefferys, J., *Retail Trading In Britain, 1850-1950,* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1954. See also Lancaster, *The Department Store.*

[10] Lancaster, *The Department Store;* Porter Benson, S., *Counter Cultures: Saleswomen, Managers and Customers in American Department Stores 1890-1940,* Illinois, University of Illinois Press, 1985; Cushman, J., 'Negotiating the Shop Floor: Employee and Union Loyalties in British and American Retail 1939-1970', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Glasgow, 2000; Miller, D., *The Bon Marché: Bourgeois Culture and The Department Store 1869-1920,* Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1980; Briggs, A., *Friends of the People. The Centenary History of Lewis's etc.,* London, Batsford, 1956.

[11] Lancaster, *The Department Store,* p125.

further research. Whilst his work is now more than ten years old, one aspect still demanding investigation is that of management growth and the increasing visibility of women as store managers. Lancaster's book covers many aspects of department store development in Britain, with employment found alongside ownership, architecture and technical changes. However, the breadth of the book prevents any detailed narrative on staffing issues.

To date, the only work that has looked in detail at the roles and growth of the female workforce is Porter Benson's work on saleswomen and managers in American department stores. Cushman's comparative study of British and American store workers, and Miller's work on French stores also provide useful comparisons with the British experience.[12] Their research confirms that class and gender remained two key issues in the experience of the shop worker during this period.

Studies undertaken by Moss and Turton, Dale and Briggs[13] on large retail companies do not provide a clear picture of the sexual hierarchy of the staff, and what part women managers played in the overall history of the shops in which they worked. These studies present a positive picture of their respective companies, with funding for the production of the book provided by the company and often coinciding with a major anniversary or event.[14] They do not provide an academic analysis of the business, but can be viewed as

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[12] Porter Benson, *Counter Cultures*; Cushman, 'Negotiating the Shop Floor'; Miller, *The Bon Marché.*

[13] Moss, M. and Turton, A., *A Legend of Retailing: House of Fraser,* London, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1989; Dale, T., *Harrods: The Store and The Legend,* London, Pan, 1981; Briggs, *Friends of the People*.

[14] For example, the Moss and Turton book was written to coincide with the takeover of the House of Fraser business by the Al Fayed family in 1989 and Corina's work on Debenhams was published to mark the bicentenary of the foundation of the Debenhams retail business. Corina, A., *Fine Silks and Oak Counters: Debenhams 1778-1978,* London, Hutchinson, 1978.

a positive marketing tool and a way of celebrating the firm's longevity and heritage. These publications concentrated on the development of stores, with particular reference to the owners, directors dates and physical transformation through rebuilding or acquisition, which are portrayed as contributing to the success of the business and its current status and position within the industry. They range in scholarly analysis, from some, including Moss and Turton, balancing the requirement for a positive company history with a scholarly approach, to others which mainly reflect the paternalistic dominance of the families and elder statesmen of the company.[15]

One book that sought to redress this 'invisibility' of the retail employee was the work of the trade union organizer P. C. Hoffman. His book *They Also Serve* contained a first hand account of working in the industry in the early 20th century.[16] His references to the JLP and its staff/management relations, provided examples of the practices which were operational in their shops at this time. However, his book does not explain the development of the management structure and the roles managers were to undertake in the interwar period. His focus remained on shop workers rather than managers, although it helpfully extended to other retail companies with whom he had contact through his trade union activities.

Another personal view of retail trade unionism is found in Margaret Bondfield's autobiography *A Life's Work,* which reflects on the trade union movement with particular reference to her experiences as a shop girl.[17] This work, although highlighting issues

[15] Bookbinder, P., *Simon Marks, Retail Revolutionary,* London, Marks and Spencer, 1993; Corina, *Fine Silks and Oak Counters* are examples of publications which reflect the dominance of the family in the development of the businesses of Marks and Spencer and Debenhams respectively.

[16] Hoffman, *They Also Serve*.

[17] Bondfield, M., *A Life's Work,* London, Hutchinson, 1949.

such as status and conditions of employment, did not examine the issues affecting the women managers within the industry.

Overall women's involvement in trade unions has attracted considerable academic attention. However, to date the only academic research which has looked specifically at trade union activity in the JLP has been undertaken by Schofield.[18] Earlier works generally concluded that the domination of the employer over pay, conditions and career opportunities extended across the female workforce.[19]

Earlier works concluded that across many industries, the female workforce was docile and unwilling, or unable, to demand high wages or promotion, and failed to take decisive action to prevent abuse. This claim is now being called into question by more recent research.[20] However, both Boston and Stevenson support the assertion that women across the workforce appeared to make little protest against bad conditions, poor pay and long working hours.[21]

The trade union view of shop floor workers and managers in the industry, which identified a need for action to improve pay and conditions, contrasts dramatically with the paternalistic model of the growth of the department store, as provided by Miller in his

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[18] Schofield, M., 'An Advance in Civilisation and Possibly the Only Alternative to Communism: John Spedan Lewis and the Partnership System with Specific Reference to Peter Jones c1914-1963', unpublished BSoc.Sc thesis, University of Manchester, 2000.

[19] See Zimmeck, 'Jobs for the Girls', ps35-48; Horn, P., *Women in the 1920s*, London, Alan Sutton, 1995, ps26-67.

[20] For example, Summerfield, P., *Women Workers in the Second World War*, London, Routledge, 1989, p190; McIvor, A., *A History of Work in Britain, 1880-1950*, Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2001, p197.

[21] This research does not specifically consider the position of female retail managers within the overall company management structure. See Boston, S., *Women Workers and the Trade Union Movement*, London, Davis Poynter, 1980, p148; Stevenson, J., *British Society 1914-1945*, London, Penguin, 1990, p176.

work on the Bon Marché,[22] and Bentall's memoirs of life in his family's department store.[23] Both works present an image of a tightly knit management structure dependent on family and kinship links. This structure can also be identified in John Spedan Lewis's [JSL] book *Partnership For All.*[24] This book, written by JSL in 1948 outlines his vision for the JLP giving a personal account of the development of the business and the implementation of his co-ownership strategy. He was later to write *Fairer Shares*[25] which expanded on the initial business approach, and a final book, a collection of his ideas taken from his numerous memoranda, *Retail Trading*[26] was published by the JLP posthumously. The second and third books described a more 'scientific' approach, which began to be adopted by the company later into the twentieth century. They provide a valuable insight into the motives of JSL and his directors for introducing new employment systems and their interpretation of the relative success or failure of these initiatives from 1918 until the immediate post World War II period.

Those who have investigated retail employment frequently identify hierarchy and paternalism as factors creating an atmosphere of subservience and control of workers. Crossick, Jaumain and Lancaster are amongst those who have included these managerial constructs in their analysis of the development of major retail businesses. [27] Most

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[22] Miller, *The Bon Marché.*

[23] Bentall, R., *My Store of Memories*, London, W H Allen, 1974.

[24] Lewis, J. S., *Partnership For All*, London, Kerr Cross, 1948.

[25] Lewis, J. S., *Fairer Shares*, London, John Lewis Partnership, 1955.

[26] Baker, H. (ed.), *Retail Trading*, London, John Lewis Partnership, 1964.

[27] Hierarchy and patriarchy are cited in Crossick, G. and Jaumain, S., 'The World of the Department Store' in Crossick, G. and Jaumain, S. (eds.), *Cathedrals of Consumption: The European Department Store, 1850-1939*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 1999, ps16-20; Lancaster, *The Department Store*, ps143-147.

relevant in this case, Quail identifies the development of managerial hierarchies in industry and commerce that were similar to those in the JLP during the 20th century.[28] The decision of the JLP management to recruit middle-class women linked by social and educational networks mirrors the male manufacturing management structure built up by the recruitment and promotion of those with similar educational and social connections, as described by Quail.[29]

Gender History

Another major body of work which has relevance to this thesis is gender history. Gender historians, including Roberts and Dyhouse, have considered female shop workers in their research into employment opportunities in a variety of industries,[30] but there have been no gender studies which identify and examine the work experience of women retail store managers. Studies of women's employment have largely concentrated on the role of working-class women,[31] whilst more recent research, including that by Todd and Alexander, has focused on young working-class girls.[32] For these groups retailing was,

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[28] Quail, J., 'From Personal Patronage to Public School Privilege', in Kidd, A. and Nicholls, D. (eds.), *The Making of the British Middle Class?*, Stroud, Sutton, 1998, ps169-185.

[29] See also Quail, J., 'Proprietors and Managers: Structure and Technique in Large British Enterprise, 1890-1939', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Leeds, 1996.

[30] Roberts, E., *Women's Work*, ps26-27; Dyhouse, C., *Girls Growing Up In Late Victorian and Edwardian England*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981.

[31] See Roberts, *Women's Work*; Boston, *Women Workers and the Trade Union Movement;* Burman, S. (ed.), *Fit Work for Women*, London, Croom Helm, 1979; Dyhouse, *Girls Growing Up In Late Victorian and Edwardian England*; John, (ed.), *Unequal Opportunities.*

[32] Todd, S., *Young Women, Work and Family in England 1918-1950*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005, p2; Alexander, S., 'Becoming A Woman in London in the 1920s and 1930s', in Alexander, S., *Becoming A Woman: and Other Essays in 19th and 20th Century Feminist History*, London, Virago, 1994, ps203-224.

and had been since the Victorian period, an important source of employment,[33] but in both cases the women formed only part of the retail workforce.

A more differentiated approach is useful; for instance, Todd has demonstrated that age, kinship and social networking were important factors in affecting women's experiences of paid employment.[34] Class is identified as the major issue in Holcombe's research on middle-class women.[35] They both indicate clear gender specific roles with which the girls and women became identified and they also assess the role their subjects played in the corporate environment and within the family. Both conclude that all the factors above were as important as the need to earn money.

Todd's research concentrates upon girls entering the job market straight from school at a similar period to that covered by this thesis, whilst Holcombe considers the relationships between middle-class women and the work place in the Victorian era prior to the period covered here. Both of these works contain information relevant to this study, however, the age profile and time periods cannot provide direct correlation with the middle-class women employed in the interwar period who are the focus of this thesis.

Other historians, including Glucksmann, Holloway, John and Wilson have provided evidence that economic need was the major reason for women to enter employment and then to remain after marriage. They have all identified the need for increased family income as a major factor in encouraging women to remain at work, and suggested that

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[33] Lancaster, *The Department Store,* ps125-155.

[34] Todd, *Young Women, Work and Family,* p227.

[35] Holcombe, *Victorian Ladies At Work,* ps103-140.

this need contributed to their perceived lack of mobility and militancy.[36] However, once again the focus of these studies are on working-class women.

Vicinus has investigated the employment opportunities open to women who had attended university. The majority of her research covered the later 19th century and some options presented in her study fall outside the period covered by this thesis,[37] but her analysis of the networks forged by women both with each other and within their wider social circle is very relevant to this thesis. These networks have also been explored by Rappaport,[38] who has identified the way many middle-class women used these to gain knowledge and information on many subjects, including employment.

Horn's work on women in the 1920s confirms that social networking was a vital component in the development of career opportunities for women. Although her work discusses the variety of employment options available to middle and upper-class women, she does not consider how these women disseminated information amongst their peer group. There is also little discussion of whether class influenced career choices and employment patterns for women from relatively affluent backgrounds. However, she recognises that retailing was one of several occupations open to educated women, despite the social stigma attached to 'working in trade'. [39]

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[36] Glucksmann, M., *Women Assemble: Women Workers and the New Industries in Inter War Britain,* London, Routledge, 1990; Holloway, G., *Women and Work in Britain Since 1840,* London, Routledge, 2005; John, (ed.), *Unequal Opportunities*; Wilson, E., *Only Halfway to Paradise: Women in Post War Britain 1945-1968,* London, Tavistock, 1980.

[37] Vicinus, M., *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women 1850-1920,* London, Virago, 1985.

[38] Rappaport, E., *Shopping For Pleasure, Women in the Making of London's West End,* Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2000, p126.

[39] Horn, *Women in the 1920s,* p52.

A number of gender historians have suggested that women became a more important and high profile group of workers across the economy during the two World Wars. For example, Beddoe and Summerfield have found evidence of a rise in the number of female managers during both the First and Second World Wars, which was followed by a backlash against women's employment when the war ended. Their work on women during and between the wars, suggests that the promotion of women reflected the lack of suitable male applicants rather than women's success in moving into these senior roles in the longer term.[40] Zweiniger-Bargielowska has similarly identified a reduction in the number of women reaching senior positions in the work place in the period following World War II.[41] This is also to be found in other works, including that of Roberts.[42] This thesis will consider whether this trend was replicated in the case of department store managers.

Other studies suggest that the restriction of job and career options ensured that women failed to break out of less demanding roles or to capitalize on the growing complexity of the structure of businesses.[43] Savage concludes that in the banking industry, women's promotion was limited to specific departments where roles often carried status but avoided the requirement to manage mixed sex teams.[44] This thesis will assess whether this was also the case within retail management.

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[40] Beddoe, *Back to Home and Duty*, ps60-61*;* Summerfield, *Women Workers in the Second World War,* p2.

[41] Zweiniger-Bargielowska, I. (ed.), *Women in Twentieth Century Britain,* London, Longman 2001, ps1-15.

[42] Roberts, *Women's Work,* p27.

[43] Savage, M., 'Women's Expertise, Men's Authority: Gendered Organisation and the Contemporary Middle Classes', in Savage, M. and Witz, A. (eds.), *Gender and Bureaucracy*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1992, p147.

[44] Ibid., p147.

Aims

This thesis will investigate the recruitment and promotion processes open to educated women in the John Lewis Partnership [JLP] group of department stores, between 1918 and 1950. It will analyse what the shop owners hoped to gain from employing these women and what new skills they brought to the workplace. It will also investigate how they were perceived by their colleagues and consider the aspirations and expectations of the women themselves. It will then assess whether they achieved and maintained managerial status and whether they contributed to the growth and increasing professionalisation of the female managerial work force. It will explore the career opportunities, pay and workplace amenities open to middle-class educated women in the JLP between 1918 and 1950. The thesis will then consider the overall growth of the management structure within the organisation and the contribution made by the women recruits. It will assess the value of the scheme in providing long-term employment for the women involved.

The thesis will investigate whether educated, middle-class women were able to demonstrate their abilities and develop new skills to achieve high status and well paid managerial careers. It will question whether those women who joined the JLP as management trainees were able to gain promotion and high levels of pay in the same way as their male colleagues. The thesis will ascertain whether middle-class women worked primarily for financial reasons, or whether ideas such as career progression and an independent lifestyle were higher priorities as indicated by the title of this thesis.

The JLP's decision to offer high rates of pay may have been one of the major attractions for middle-class women. However, this research will investigate whether this also

created internal problems in the company, by excluding longer serving, more experienced male and female staff from the opportunity to obtain promotion and therefore achieve the same level of pay as the new recruits. Finally, the thesis will consider whether the women managers in the JLP provide evidence of a group of assertive workers, who moved into departments and managerial positions previously dominated by men and were able to retain their high status after 1945. It will determine whether they challenged managerial convention which, before the First World War, had imposed restrictions on the opportunities open to women from both the working and middle-classes and, if so, what methods the educated women studied in this thesis utilised to ensure their ability to compete.

Research Questions

This thesis will examine four main research questions relating to the recruitment and employment practices undertaken by the JLP between 1918 and 1950.

- It will firstly explore the system as it operated in 1918, considering why it was felt necessary to undertake such a dramatic revision of employment strategy after World War I, and the implications of this reorganisation in relation to the employment of middle-class women. Pay, conditions and retention levels will be examined to analyse the strengths and weaknesses of the recruitment strategy.
- Secondly, the thesis will consider the importance of class and education in the recruitment drive and in the longer term employment of women managers into the 1920s and 1930s. It will look in detail at the Learnership Scheme, which was the main vehicle for the Company's employment and promotion strategy at this time. It will discuss why the Company sought to recruit articulate, intelligent managers in addition to promoting those with long service and experience.

- Thirdly, the thesis will discuss the impact of the growth and complexity of department store systems and physical expansion of the JLP chain of stores on women managers and will question whether this had an impact on the variety of managerial positions available to middle-class women across the company.
- Finally, the thesis will focus on the impact of World War II on the continuing recruitment and promotion of women. It will discuss whether the women who achieved high managerial status by 1950 did so on merit and whether the time and money spent on the Learnership Scheme had been of value to the Company. The thesis will assess the impact of political and economic factors, including the call up of many of the Partnership's senior male managers during the period 1939 - 1945, on the availability of managerial vacancies. By extending the period covered by this thesis beyond the end of the World War II, it is possible to determine whether the pre-war recruitment of middle-class women as managers had a long term impact on the composition of the managerial workforce.

Methodology

This thesis adopts a case study approach, and is organised chronologically. It is based on an analysis of the private business archive of the JLP. This corporate archive contains memoranda, letters, personal files and committee minutes which were created when the new recruitment and employment strategies were being introduced, and which charted their progress throughout the interwar, wartime and immediate post war period. The archive has been little explored by previous researchers.

As with all business archives, there are chronological and subject specific gaps. The lack of comprehensive records on some topics, such as external training schemes, incomplete runs of documents and the selective retention of some material, particularly personal

papers and correspondence, does hamper the exhaustive assessment of the overall success or failure of the recruitment and promotion initiatives. During World War II the papers housed at Peter Jones survived, but in John Lewis many pre-war staff related documents, including some personal files, were burned or ruined by water following the destruction of the Oxford Street shop in September 1940.[45]

Despite this, a considerable amount of relevant material still remains in the company archive, including the complete numerical sequence of memoranda dictated by JSL, who retained overall control of the business during this period. These memoranda, numbering almost forty thousand, are listed and catalogued, and have been made available for this study. They contain all the correspondence from JSL's office on the subject of employment policy, including the Learnership Scheme. The memoranda include correspondence with individual recruits involved in the scheme.

The correspondence received by JSL on this subject is far less comprehensive, with few papers retained amongst his office copies. This creates an unbalanced picture of the contribution of others to the programme, which has been addressed by the use of other related material, including staffing reports, compiled by the Staff Advice Department. These contain details of the progress of the trainees, comments by buyers and other senior managers, committee minutes and letters from the house magazine.

The business and personal papers of Sarah Lewis, who was an early recruit to the Learnership Scheme and was later given the role of co-ordinating this Scheme, are also available for scrutiny. Her personal papers, including diaries and letters to her friends, have been retained in the archive and add a unique dimension to the resources found

[45] John Lewis Oxford Street was completely destroyed by an oil bomb in September 1940 and the majority of the pre war staff records were never recovered. See MacPherson, H. (ed.), *John Spedan Lewis 1885-1963*, London, John Lewis Partnership, 1985, p177. This book, published by the JLP to mark the centenary of the birth of JSL, contains in-depth interviews with the senior managers who worked with him over the period 1922 to his death in 1963.

within the business archive collection. The documents record her recruitment into the company and her subsequent promotion and later marriage to JSL. The papers highlight issues relating to the relationship between the 'Learners' and management and also the way in which they viewed their employment.

During the interwar period Sarah Lewis was also in contact with recruitment agencies, including the University Appointments Boards for Oxford, Cambridge and London Universities, and correspondence with these bodies is housed in the archive. Other business documents created by the Staff Management teams, the Committee for Education and the Establishment Director also contain references to the Learnership Scheme and individual trainees. The papers record the decisions made regarding the future of recruits, the opportunities open to them and details of pay.

Although extensive business records produced by the Company are available, there is less material created by the women recruits themselves. Records of those women who remained within the JLP for a number of years and whose personal files have been retained in the archive contain relevant information on pay, conditions and career routes. However, there is not a consistent amount of data within these files from which to analyse their intentions, aspirations or personal circumstances. The women who chose to leave the company after a short spell of employment are not featured in the archive records and this lack of material results in an incomplete picture of why they decided to join and why their career at the shops ended.

As a result, the existing material has been supplemented by interviews with retired staff. These interviews were carried out as part of the collection policy of the archive and not specifically for the purpose of this research. Staff were interviewed by the Archivist to obtain life story recordings, some lasting up to three hours, which covered their working lives both before, during and after their employment with the JLP. Up to seventy

interviews are now held in the archive. Many contained useful background information on the development of the JLP but of these two (Murphy and Glasspole) contained material selected for this research. Whilst historians have increasingly accepted the validity of oral interviews, these memories of long serving employees must be viewed with care.[46] It must be acknowledged, for example, that their opinions may contain a degree of subjectivity and inaccuracy, given their probable company loyalty and hind sight, and the length of time which has passed since the Learnership Scheme was introduced by the Company. Nevertheless, these oral interviews provide a record of the thoughts and ideas of the women who were given managerial positions within the company, including a complete interview with a woman who joined as a Learner in the 1930s.[47]

Reminiscences and interviews with other retired staff members provide evidence of the views of other managers and employees who worked alongside, or below, the women managers who had participated in the Learnership scheme. Interviews with senior male managers which have been retained in the archive provide a third set of opinions on the value and success of female management recruits. These oral interviews were carried out as a project run by the archive to record the life stories of retired staff at all levels, from shop floor staff to senior managers, and were not specifically commissioned for this thesis.

The house magazine, *The Gazette*, which was published weekly, provides a continuous, contemporary source which reflected both company policy and the thoughts of the

[46] Issues with the use of oral testimony are discussed in Perks, R. and Thomson, A., *The Oral History Reader,* London, Routledge, 1987; Thompson, P., *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1978.

[47] Interview with Mrs S. Murphy in Oral interviews, Murphy, A/Oral/Murphy, 2004, John Lewis Partnership Archive (JLP Archive), Stevenage.

managers and workers who contributed to it. Although initially a mouthpiece for the views and strategies initiated by JSL, *The Gazette*'s usefulness is enhanced by JSL's decision to allow space for readers' letters in each edition. These letters could be written anonymously on any subject, without apparent censorship and, as such, provide a unique perspective on how the staff viewed the new management initiatives to recruit and promote young, educated women. There was a clear directive from JSL that no letters should be suppressed and even those condemning the policy regarding the employment of married women were published. *The Gazette* also published details of the Partnership Census, which was carried out annually between 1920 and 1934, and then on an irregular basis until 1950. This document was compiled by the Department of Staff Advice, giving names, length of service, shop and department in which the member of staff was employed. It has been used in this thesis to identify the progress of Learners across the Company and provide information on their career path. The Census also gives information on their geographical mobility, as the number of shops within the group expanded during the 1930s and 1940s.

The use of the business archive has exposed a wealth of previously unused material. Despite gaps in some series of records, the collection includes other documents to make up for the omissions. For example, the small number of personal files giving in-depth reports on specific trainees can be supplemented by using the Company Census to follow the progress of recruits as they moved to new roles in other geographical locations, or left the Company.

The archive is catalogued and listed, making research into all subjects related to this thesis straightforward and no material has been withheld by the Company. The collection has been supplemented with limited research in the archives of Girton College Cambridge, which was used to identify the educational background of the recruits and to

investigate whether other department stores also recruited similar women into management positions during the interwar years.

Content

Chapter 1 will consider the structure of department store retail management in the John Lewis and Peter Jones shops which formed the JLP in London in the 1920s. It will show that the small number of buyers with responsibility for managing staffing, stock, departmental book keeping and control of the shop floor were predominantly men, with few women attaining levels of high status. The focus of this initial chapter will be on the problems this caused as the stores expanded, and the opportunities this created for women as new management strategies were piloted, devolving control to an increasing number of junior managers. New ideas and initiatives to increase the number and calibre of managers was to lead to the introduction of the Learnership Scheme in 1918. The chapter will examine the Company's reasons for recruiting women and how they were selected. The Learnership Scheme will be discussed in detail, highlighting issues including the fast tracking of suitable applicants, the decision to offer equal pay to men and women and the lack of any marriage bar.

Chapter 2 will explore the new and distinctive management practices introduced as a result of the reorganisation of buyers at Peter Jones during the period 1918 to 1929. The chapter will consider the impact of this strategy on the women who had been recruited on the Learnership Scheme and who were moved into these newly created junior managerial positions. It will question whether this new tier of management was given the opportunity to develop their skills and branch out into other areas of the business, including senior clerical positions, training and recruitment. The impact on women managers of the linking of the Oxford Street and Sloane Square shops under the new management

structure introduced by JSL following the death of John Lewis senior in 1928, and of the creation of the JLP in 1929, will also be assessed.

Chapter 3 will focus on the aggressive enlargement of the Company during the 1930s, which led to large increases in the number of managerial positions open to both male and female employees. It will consider the management structure which developed to accommodate this expansion, and will assess whether roles became more gender-specific during the later 1930s. The newly created role of Registrar will be examined in detail, as it offered positions to educated women which carried high status, but which had low executive power (and was a position held exclusively by women).

In the final chapter, the impact of World War II and its aftermath on the continuing recruitment and employment of women managers is reviewed. The opportunity for women to move into specialist departments, including staff training, staff management and welfare departments will be discussed and the extent to which they were given managerial status will be explored. The conclusion will analyse the impact of the women recruits on the overall development of the business, and will consider their ability to reach and retain positions of high pay and status, balancing this against the suggestion that they simply viewed employment as 'a kind of superior hobby' prior to returning to hearth and home. [48]

[48] Vera Brittain quoted in Horn, *Women in the 1920s*, p57.

CHAPTER ONE

Challenges and Opportunities 1918-1930

Management Structure Prior to 1918

In 1864 John Lewis opened his first drapery shop on Oxford Street in London. The shop expanded and by 1906 Lewis was running this and another department store, Peter Jones in Chelsea, with his 21 year old son, John Spedan Lewis [JSL]. The younger Lewis was given a quarter share in the Oxford Street business, worth £50,000, and spent the next eight years learning the trade from his father. The business was successful, with John Lewis running the shops in an autocratic management style which restricted authority to all but the family and a few key male buyers who had been recruited as juniors and were promoted after years of service.[49]

Between 1906 and 1928 John Lewis's traditional paternalistic management style continued. [50] In 1915 JSL's younger brother Oswald joined the business, resulting in complete control of the business being shared amongst the three men and a small number of additional directors, most of whom had family connections.[51]

In 1909 JSL suffered severe injuries in a riding accident, which forced him to convalesce at home for two years until he was fit enough to return to work. During this time away

[49] Lewis, J. S., *Partnership For All*, London, Kerr Cross, 1948, p8.

[50] John Lewis died in 1928 at the age of 92, never having retired from the business. See MacPherson, H. (ed.), *John Spedan Lewis 1885-1963*, London, John Lewis Partnership, 1985, p157.

[51] Ibid., p157. Oswald Lewis sold his share to Spedan in 1926 and took up a career as a barrister.

from the business he planned a series of improvements to the shops, which he saw as vital to increase productivity and secure the future of the Company.[52]

On his return to work he was keen to increase productivity through better staff relations, systems and facilities. However, his father was not convinced that these ideas would be successful and refused to allow Spedan to implement them at the Oxford Street shop. The two men frequently argued, with Mrs John Lewis and Oswald acting as mediators, attempting to defuse the tension between father and son.[53]

Mrs Lewis had been one of the first women to attend Girton College in Cambridge. As the daughter of a successful draper she had a good knowledge of the trade and was able to contribute to the development of the business. Although not involved with the day to day running of the shops, she was to have considerable influence on JSL's ideas on industrial democracy. Her links with other educated women provided a home environment in which JSL experienced debates on society, women and work that were to have a lasting impact on the development of his ideas on the employment of women.[54]

Despite their disagreements, JSL continued to work at Oxford Street with his father and brother, but in 1914 it was agreed that he could take sole control of Peter Jones. He travelled to Sloane Square each day after working at Oxford Street. In 1916 he relinquished his quarter share in the Oxford Street shop in exchange for his father's

[52] Other changes included the shortening of the working day, improvements in the hostel facilities and increased pay for all staff. See Lewis, *Partnership For All,* p31.

[53] Ibid., p20.

[54] In the dedication at the front of his book *Fairer Shares,* JSL wrote: 'This book is dedicated to my father, whose service to his customers won for the business he created a reputation so good that it seemed well for the John Lewis Partnership that it should bear his name, and to my mother, who was always in favour not only of fairness but of kindness'. Lewis, J.S., *Fairer Shares,* London, John Lewis Partnership, 1954, p*v.*

controlling holding in the capital of Peter Jones.[55] His new business plan led to a turn around in the profitability of the business from a loss of £8295 in 1916 to a profit of £8646 by 1919.[56]

During this period JSL recruited new staff, introduced a new management structure, better employee conditions and a staff council. These initiatives played an important part in JSL's plan to develop a form of workers' co-operative, which allowed staff to be involved in the management of the business and gave them a share in the profits. He was later to describe this philosophy as 'a possible advance in civilisation and perhaps the only alternative to Communism'.[57] However, this was in direct conflict with John Lewis's belief in the 'Divine Right of Employers'[58] and the rift between the two men was only healed on the death of Mrs Lewis in 1924. Following this the two men were reconciled and JSL returned to an active management role at Oxford Street alongside his father and brother, in addition to his continued total control of Peter Jones.[59]

The decade following the First World War, during which JSL began his management changes, was not only turbulent for the family, but also for the retail economy in which the shops traded. These economic peaks and troughs were to have a profound effect on the way the department store trade developed and contributed to the new direction the two shops were to take in the 1930s.

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[55] Lewis, *Partnership For All*, p24.

[56] Company results from 1916 to 1926 published in John Lewis Partnership published Report and Accounts, 1916 – 1950, A/106, in John Lewis Partnership Archive (JLP Archive), Stevenage.

[57] The subtitle of Lewis, *Fairer Shares*.

[58] Lewis, *Partnership For All*, p13.

[59] MacPherson, (ed.), *John Spedan Lewis,* p155.

The Need For Change 1919 - 1929

In the spring of 1919 large retailers in London[60] experienced an upturn in trade, despite continuing problems in obtaining stock and retaining staff, which had been compounded by the war-time economy.[61] Government policy sought to hold back personal spending and dampen down the retail market.[62] These measures proved a major concern to store owners and managers, and led to the re-evaluation of the process of selling.[63] Some companies, such as Debenham and Freebody, began to acquire additional department stores, whilst persistent labour problems and the shortage of stock encouraged other store owners to sell up.[64] These actions were to be repeated both in London and the provinces during the interwar period.

However, not all businesses resorted to expansion or closure immediately after World War I. The JLP and others chose to rejuvenate their long-established businesses. They replaced old methods of purchasing, recruitment and service, and implemented

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[60] The department stores in London during the late Victorian and Edwardian period are listed in Adburgham, A., *Shops and Shopping 1800-1914: Where and in What Manner the Well Dressed Englishwoman Bought Her Clothes*, London, Barrie and Jenkins, 1989, ps283-287. She differentiates them from the multiple chains which were to dominate the later part of the twentieth century. See also Jefferys, J., *Retail Trading In Britain, 1850-1950,* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1954.

[61] Lancaster, B., *The Department Store: A Social History*, Leicester, Leicester University Press, 1995, p81; Moss, M. and Turton, A., *A Legend of Retailing: House of Fraser*, London, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1989, p117.

[62] On the post World War I economy see Winter, J. and Roberts, J.L. (eds.), *Capital Cities at War: London, Paris, Berlin, 1914-1919*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1997*;* McKibbin, R., *Classes and Cultures in England 1918-1951*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1998; Stevenson, J., *British Society 1914-1945,* London, Penguin, 1990.

[63] Jefferys, *Retail Trading in Britain,* p40.

[64] Debenham and Freebody acquired Marshall and Snellgrove in 1919 and later Harvey Nicholls. John Barker took over Derry & Toms in 1920. Moss and Turton, *A Legend of Retailing*, p117.

innovative and supposedly more scientifically based management systems. These new working practices included such measures as the introduction of formal recruitment schemes, credit control and regulated stock control methods, all of which had implications for the work force.[65]

Initial changes to staffing began in February 1919, when JSL announced in the house magazine *The Gazette,* that he intended to drive forward the increased sales momentum through the introduction of new working practices. His first steps had been to improve staff living conditions, shorten the working week and introduce a profit sharing scheme for the staff.[66] The improvements continued, but JSL realised that these changes alone would not be enough to improve the retention of staff and to encourage them to provide better service, suggest new ideas for the business and develop strategies to move the business forward. He studied the profile of his staff and assessed what other methods he could adopt to create a more dynamic workforce. He looked outside the JLP, particularly at women with previous managerial experience in other businesses, or who had been to university and were now entering the workplace. They presented a supply of female labour for retail employers at a time when the demands of the economy resulted in a need to increase the workforce as services and systems became increasingly complex.

The Retail Economy 1918 -1950

Between 1901 and 1951 average British incomes increased by 500%, resulting in an overall increase in real terms (taking into consideration inflation and price increases) of

[65] Jefferys, *Retail Trading in Britain,* p60.

[66] Lewis, *Partnership For All*, p32.

50% during the same period.[67] This increase in disposable income was particularly marked in the social groups who were shopping in London's department stores. The centrality of London as the key shopping location in the south east of England, and the dominance of the West End within the city boosted the profile of the central department stores such as John Lewis and Peter Jones.[68]

Despite the economic turbulence in Britain in the later 1920s and 1930s, the overall trend in the development of the department store trade in London was one of marked growth.[69] However, not all department stores enjoyed strong growth. Shops which controlled prices, and invested in new stock and systems, including branded goods, flourished.[70] In 1919/20 sales soared, with Harrods recording net profits of over £500,000 and the Army & Navy, John Barker, Maple, Selfridges and Whiteley's all achieving record profits in excess of £250,000. However, longstanding, less progressive businesses, including Swan & Edgar and Derry & Toms, suffered and were taken over in 1920 by Harrods and Barkers respectively.[71]

At John Lewis in Oxford Street, where trade was improving, turnover for 1920 exceeded £1m, with the silk department alone recording sales of around £460,000.[72] This increase in business, combined with an increase in the amount of time consumers were spending

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[67] Benson, J., *The Rise of Consumer Society in Britain 1880-1980*, London, Longman, 1994, p13.

[68] Rappaport, E., *Shopping For Pleasure: Women in the Making of London's West End,* Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2000, especially Chapter 1, ps16-47.

[69] Lancaster, *The Department Store*, p103.

[70] The importance of branding and price controls has been identified by Lancaster as a key aspect of department store trading in the interwar period. Ibid., p88.

[71] Ibid., p90.

[72] Company results from 1916 to 1926 published in John Lewis and Company Ltd. published Report and Accounts, 1916-1950, in A/106, JLP Archive.

on shopping,[73] ensured store managers took steps to further exploit this consumer demand. More staff were required to assist the increasing number of new customers who could enjoy the facilities, attractions and new departments, which included ready made clothing and electrical goods. [74]

Other factors also stimulated the capital's retail market. One in six people of the British population were living in London during the interwar period. The availability of funding by banks and building societies contributed to many more people purchasing their own homes for the first time. Owner occupation grew from 10% of the population in 1914 to 30% in 1951.[75] These properties required new furniture and household goods, which department stores were able to supply.

Improvements in public transport, including trams and the underground system around the city, allowed easier access to the central shopping areas of London for both customers and prospective staff, encouraging large retailers to advertise their assortment in a wider catchment area. Many of these customers were encouraged to visit the shops for the first time by increased magazine and newspaper advertising,[76] although the system of postal ordering, which had been in operation for many years, continued to provide an alternative to visiting the stores in person. The postal ordering system was to develop across the country in the interwar period, becoming highly organised and requiring extensive, complex systems which were generally operated by trained female clerical staff. [77]

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[73] Benson, *The Rise of Consumer Society in Britain*, p14.

[74] Lancaster, *The Department Store,* p101.

[75] Benson, *The Rise of Consumer Society in Britain*, p12.

[76] Horwood, C., *Keeping up Appearances: Fashion and Class Between the Wars,* London, Sutton, 2005, p69.

[77] Thomas Russell, advertising report, 1925, A/111/7 (2), in JLP Archive.

To ensure they appealed to this new and more dispersed customer base, the management of Peter Jones commissioned a report, compiled by an advertising consultant, which analysed the social status of those who used the shop. It confirmed that the store attracted a largely local clientele, with most credit customers living in the SW1 and SW3 areas and with a large mail order customer base in the Midlands and North. The diversity of class of the store's customers was summed up as 'people who read the *Daily Mail* like a bible and people who wouldn't wipe their boots on it'.[78] In the early 1920s there was a focussed attempt by the management of the store to identify the customer profile and direct their sales techniques towards a higher spending group. However, this was to prove difficult, with the customer profile remaining much lower than was generally preferred by JSL and his management team.[79] In an effort to raise this profile a number of initiatives were introduced, which were to have a profound effect on the recruitment policy of the store.[80]

The identification of the customer profile led the management to increase staffing numbers, particularly recruiting those who could demonstrate the social skills to engage with a higher class of customer. However, rapid staff turnover, due mainly to the industry's continuing low pay, poor working conditions and long working hours, continued to hamper the recruitment of long term, high quality staff.[81]

Until taking over at Peter Jones after World War I, JSL, like most retailers, had relied on the natural progression of staff through the ranks to provide the store with its managers

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[78] Ibid.

[79] Baker, H. (ed.), *Retail Trading,* London, John Lewis Partnership, 1964, ps145-147.

[80] Quail, J., 'From Personal Patronage to Public School Privilege', in Kidd, A. and Nicholls D. (eds.), *The Making of the British Middle Class*?, Stroud, Sutton, 1998, p171.

[81] See Miller, D., *The Bon Marché: Bourgeois Culture and The Department Store 1869-1920*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1980, p38.

and buyers. Although new staff, at all levels, were required, he paid particular attention to the calibre of staff who were to manage the new departments and buy the stock. He was disappointed at the level of ability he found in Peter Jones and other similar establishments and became convinced that new blood was required to move the business forward. A new recruitment drive was initiated in the early months of 1919.

New Working Practices

Before World War I buyers and managers at Peter Jones and John Lewis had been promoted after considerable length of service, but now JSL sought to expand his portfolio of management talent by looking at people outside the retailing field.[82] In 1916 he started to seek staff through personal connection with those already employed within the shop. However, he found them lacking in education, unable to converse with his customers to discern their needs and appreciate their requirements, and without the society connections he thought were vital to attract the higher spending customers whom he felt would improve the level of trade.[83] JSL viewed the management style at Oxford Street and Peter Jones as outdated and decided to try a new approach. He was later to write:

> the Partnership began to recruit itself a little from fields upon which up to that time business of our kind, retail distribution, had drawn hardly at all, except here and there a son or other relative of the owner of a business. Shop-keeping, unless possibly in enterprises of their own, had not been reckoned a possible occupation.[84]

[82] Lewis, *Partnership For All*, p8.

[83] Ibid., p5.

[84] Ibid., p30.

Recruitment was undertaken on the basis of ability, connections and commitment, rather than gender or previous employment history. There is no documentary evidence in the archive to state whether JSL had particular preference for recruiting either male or female staff in the 1920s. However, recruitment figures confirm that more women applied for these posts than men.

One reason for this would appear to be that as women were being laid off following the demobilization of men from the front, there was a growing pool of women who had experienced the workplace and who either desired, or needed to continue working. This group of middle-class women had found it difficult to relocate into other responsible roles in other industries. This was due not only to a slowdown in the British economy, but also to a change in the way women workers were perceived. Bruley comments that: 'The expulsion of the female workforce was accompanied (and assisted) by a transformation in public and media perceptions of women workers'.[85] Although some working-class women workers could justify a return to work on the grounds of economic necessity, their middle-class sisters found less sympathy from their families, peers and the media. The fields and opportunities open for women were restricted further as the economy continued to worsen and they began to be seen, by some contemporary reporters, as 'ruthless self seekers depriving men and their dependants of a livelihood'.[86]

Todd and Beddoe,[87] amongst others, comment on the reduction in the number of posts available for women, although most examine working-class women whilst the experiences of middle-class workers have been largely neglected. Government

[85] Bruley, S., *Women in Britain Since 1900,* Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1999, p61.

[86] Clephane, I., *Towards Sex Freedom*, London, John Lane, 1935, ps200-1.

[87] Todd, S., Y*oung Women, Work and Family in England 1918-1950,* Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005, p135; Beddoe, D., *Back To Home and Duty, Women Between the Wars 1918-1939,* London, Pandora, 1989, p48.

departments and the civil service reduced the numbers of women who had previously been employed as middle managers in roles such as factory inspectors or senior clerical officers.[88] By 1919 the War Office alone had shed 700 women, with little opportunity for suitable alternative work.[89]

One former factory inspector, Sarah Beatrice Hunter, was recruited by the JLP in 1922. She was to go on to marry JSL in 1923, and became the Deputy Chairman of the Partnership from 1929-1951.[90] Her role within the Partnership was central to the strategy of attracting educated women. She continued to work after the birth of her three children, maintaining a strong network of contacts established during her time at Somerville College Oxford, and through professional women's bodies of which she was an active member.[91] Her contribution to the recruitment and training for women from a similar background was key to the continuation of the Learnership Scheme. Working with JSL, Sarah Lewis developed the employment strategy promoting the recruitment of women, despite reservations from other members of the JLP senior management. As JSL noted:

> My wife believes that, in the twenty six years, for which she has known the Partnership, there has been in the minds of its abler women members a strong and

[88] Boston, S., *Women Workers and the Trade Union Movement*, London, Davis Poynter, 1980, p137.

[89] Bruley, *Women in Britain Since 1900,* p61.

[90] Hunter graduated from Somerville in 1914 and was then employed in various government departments until she joined the Partnership in 1922. See Appendix 3.

[91] Sarah Lewis was a member of the Appointments Board of London and Oxford Universities, a member of the London Committee of the Oxford Society and an executive committee member of the Women's Employment Federation. See Education Committee, file, 1930-1950, A/3769, in JLP Archive.

> more or less justified feeling that none of the Partnership's leaders would go nearly so far as I do in giving important posts to women.[92]

JSL and his wife both felt that university-educated women possessed a suitable width and depth of knowledge and an ability to learn quickly. The JLP required trained, professional people in the shop within months, rather than after many years of training which had previously been the way managers and buyers had been appointed. They also realised that the opportunities open to these women were still relatively limited, and took advantage of the willingness of many women to look at the fields of business and commerce as a source of employment. At the same time JSL and his wife were aware that the universities were keen to find placements for their female graduates, and they travelled to Oxford and Cambridge to discuss training schemes and future job prospects in retailing with the University Appointments Boards.[93] The JLP was by no means the only retailer which employed young single educated women. The archive of Girton College shows evidence of graduates moving to Harrods, Selfridges and Lewis's Ltd, although there is less evidence that other industries followed retail in the recruitment of female graduates.[94]

At Peter Jones, JSL employed those whom he felt shared his vision of a new way of organising the JLP as a profit sharing community rather than a commercial business. He was determined to show that there was an alternative way of operating a successful business to that of capitalism or communism. His 'Partnership' ideas found favour with

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[92] Lewis, *Partnership For All*, p215.

[93] Visits from representatives of Lewis's Ltd, Harrods and Selfridges recorded in Appointments Book, 1930-1966, APTB/3/1-6B 8-11, p23, in Archive, Girton College, Cambridge.

[94] Ibid., p23.

many new recruits who sympathised with his motives. In 1922 he recruited Bernard Miller, who was later to succeed him as Chairman of the JLP. In an interview in 1985 Miller commented:

> I wouldn't claim I was an apostle of the Partnership and that was what I had come for, but it was something that clicked into place. He made me feel it wasn't just a question of making money but that he had ideas which were really a 20th century manifestation of the sort of thing that had been stirring in the early part of the 19th.[95]

Other Learners were also attracted by the opportunity to become part of a radical new way of running a business, with Bernard Miller viewing it as growing to 'resemble in some respects the Religious Orders of the Middle Ages'.[96] This desire to view work as something more than simply a way to earn money has been identified by Vicinus in her work on middle-class women of the 19th century, where she describes them as 'expecting more than just a salary in exchange for their labour; work for them offered a sense of purpose and identity as they worked towards acceptance as professionals'.[97]

The immediate post war years were a period where new ways of living and working were being explored, allowing new ideas on the way society was conducted to be tried out, particularly in the capital. As Trainor noted, 'The middle-class in London, was the leading instrument of a process of broadly based, economic, social and political

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[95] Interview with Miller on his recruitment into the JLP and his interest at Oxford in the Owenite experiments in co-ownership in the early 19th century. In MacPherson, (ed.), *John Spedan Lewis*, p23. His comments were based on JSL's comment in *Partnership For All.* See Lewis, J. S., *Partnership For All*, London, Kerr Cross, 1948, p29.

[96] Lewis, *Partnership For All*, p29.

[97] Vicinus M., *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women 1850-1920*, London, Virago, 1985, p6.

change'.[98] It was here during this period that JSL's new approach found a sympathetic audience, although some, including his father, thought the Partnership scheme was doomed to fail. 'Who', he asked, 'Do you suppose would bear the carking cares of business for such a miserable remuneration as this would mean?'[99]

In addition to university graduates JSL extended his search for new managers in the wider economy, looking 'for those whose upbringing and natural abilities would make them normal recruits for the public services or the learned professions.'[100] He also looked at those working in the theatre and allied fields, but a major source of new recruits were the women who shopped in the store. Many belonged to the professional families who had settled in Chelsea and Kensington. They were well educated, with the sophisticated taste which JSL associated with the type of trade he was aiming for at Peter Jones. He used his personal connection with long-standing customers, and his reputation as a fair and enterprising employer, to reduce the stigma which was attached to shop work, to encourage these women to work at Peter Jones.[101]

He was assisted in this new view of shop work by the improved facilities, new merchandise and more relaxed approach to shopping. Increasingly viewed as a leisure activity, it provided the large stores with a certain kudos and removed some of the social stigma attached to 'working in trade'. JSL noted: 'It became "the thing" to go into a shop – a shop, of course of a certain status, and Peter Jones came within that line'.[102]

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[98] Trainor, R., 'Neither Metropolitan nor Provincial' in Kidd, A. and Nicholls, D. (eds.), *The Making of the British Middle Class?,* Stroud, Sutton, 1998, p206.

[99] Lewis, *Partnership For All*, p20.

[100] Ibid., p30.

[101] Phillips, A., *A Newnham Anthology,* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1979, p178.

[102] Lewis, *Partnership For All*, p30.

Given the increasing independence of young women throughout the country,[103] working in commerce could also be seen by some middle-class women as an almost rebellious move.[104] The Learnership Scheme offered a structured career path and demonstrated a degree of professionalism which suggested a more positive view of future promotion and development opportunities for the recruits. It provided an alternative to the very limited entry routes into other professions, requiring a shorter training period and a well paid path through to management positions. This was an added attraction for women looking for a short term career who intended to work only until marriage.

The Learnership Scheme

This initiative was informally introduced in 1918 to a small number of selected applicants. These recruits were placed within a training framework, giving them a clear identity within the Company. This was a new development in the retail sector and attracted interest from prospective recruits, recruitment agencies and the media.[105]

Furthermore, JSL was willing to incur the extra expenditure to ensure he recruited the right calibre of staff, advertising his Learnerships with an average starting salary of £3 per week. This was at a time when the average full time weekly earnings for women was around 28 shillings per week.[106] Compared to other London retailers including Harrods, who were also recruiting 'Students' who were assigned to their Contingency department,

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[103] Horwood, *Keeping up Appearances*, p4.

[104] The article 'Snobs and Jobs' confirms that this was the attitude of one Peter Jones employee. *The Gazette*, 1.12.928, p705, in JLP Archive.

[105] Press cuttings relating to the Learnership Scheme. Magazine, journal and newspaper articles, in cutting books, 1925-1946, A/252/i & iia, in JLP Archive.

[106] Newman O. and Foster, A., *The Value of a Pound, Prices and Incomes in Britain 1900-1993*, London, Gale Research International, 1995, p50.

the JLP wages were good. The Harrods trainees earned 25 shillings per week for the first year, 30 shillings for the second and 35 shillings for the third. Selfridges, whose trainees were known as the Flying Squad, could only expect 25 shillings per week.[107]

However, there was a drawback to the JLP scheme. The Learnership scheme operated a remuneration account, whereby the Learner claimed as much as she felt she was worth each week. She was paid that amount, but her department manager was also required to assess her value. If she was valued below the amount she had claimed, the discrepancy was recorded in her remuneration account and would have to be paid back as her performance improved. This was a small clause written into the contract, and one which was not readily spotted by those eager to join.

One recruit who failed to read the small print was Amy Johnson, the aviatrix who joined Peter Jones in 1924. After graduating form the University of Hull in 1923 she moved to the store but quickly realised she was building up a debt. In her diary she wrote, 'Do you know what they valued my services at last week? Ten shillings! So I already owe the firm £2 10 shillings'.[108] Learners were given a trial month at the end of which they could leave. Many of them, like Amy Johnson, did and the debt was not repaid. This loophole allowed some recruits to exploit the month's employment. One even mentioned in *The Gazette* that she regarded them as fools to trust her. JSL was forced to admit that 'she was far from the being the only one who had some feeling of that sort'.[109]

As staffing costs were allocated to each department, it became unpopular with buyers to accept Learners into their teams. To avoid the burden of high pay for low initial productivity, JSL soon decided to finance part of the remuneration accounts from his own

[107] JSL memorandum no. 11576, 10.1.1929, in JLP Archive.

[108] Babbington Smith, C., *Amy Johnson*, London, Collins, 1967, p86.

[109] *The Gazette*, 4.2.1928, p5, in JLP Archive.

funds. This reduced the pressure on the business and allowed the scheme to continue as the number of recruits increased.[110]

The high level of pay was also unpopular with longer serving staff, who felt the young inexperienced Learners did not deserve their high salaries. Anonymous letters to *The Gazette* questioned the prudence of this strategy, suggesting the more traditional form of recruitment and training was preferable to the new fast track system operating at Peter Jones.[111]

There was another way in which recruits could boost their earnings, and this became widely known amongst the friends and families of the Learners and other employees. In 1923 JSL introduced a system of personal connection bonus payments.[112] This system allowed those with friends and family who shopped in the store to benefit from the amount they spent. Obviously this was a perk which had particular relevance for the middle-class employees whose peers were already regular customers in Peter Jones. Some Learners made large amounts of money through this scheme. In 1928 Mrs Hogg earned an extra £28 14s 9d, with around 180 other employees benefiting from bonuses varying between £56 to less than £1.[113] From this list of top earners the social profile of the staff becomes apparent. Thirteen were male (including a Major and a Captain), thirty female (including The Hon. Mrs Edwardes, The Viscountess Massereene and Ferrard, and The Countess Golfarelli). The majority had been recruited as Learners within the previous year.[114]

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[110] Ibid., 20.7.1929, p429.

[111] Ibid., 13.4.1929, p149.

[112] JSL memorandum no. 5373, 23.11.1923, in JLP Archive.

[113] *The Gazette*, 31.3.1928, ps124-5, in JLP Archive.

[114] Staff list, Census, in Supplement, *The Gazette*, 1928, in JLP Archive.

Equal Pay and Roles for Married Women

Although the Sex Discrimination (Removal) Act of 1919 was an attempt to make it easier for women to enter the professions, it was remarkably unsuccessful, with less than 200 women qualifying to practice law by 1935 and under 3000 female doctors practising by 1931.[115] This failure increased the opportunities for other industries to capitalise on the growing number of educated women who were actively looking for employment. Futhermore, many industries which did employ women continued to discriminate by offering lower wages than those paid to men. In the Partnership, JSL insisted that there should be no difference between the sexes and paid men and women trainee managers the same rate for the same job.[116] The company's policy was to recruit on ability and commitment. JSL confirmed:

> Others may aim, as does the John Lewis Partnership, at recruiting themselves impartially from all around the world – both sexes, all ages, all races, all social classes.[117]

This policy, at least theoretically, provided women with the opportunity to compete with men for any position within the Company. However, in reality there were still departments and specific roles which were not thought suitable for women. In furnishing departments such as fabrics and furniture, where experience was considered by both

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[115] Pugh, M., *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain 1914-1959*, London, MacMillan, 1992, p94.

[116] The average full time earnings between 1919 and 1929 were 58.9 shillings for men and 28.4 shillings for women. Bowley, A. L., *Wages and Incomes in the UK since 1860*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1937, p51. JLP pay rates available in Personal files, no date, A/502/j; A/531/a; A/636/fi; A/880/ii; A/2461/d; A/2497/a; A2497/ h(i).

[117] Lewis, *Fairer Shares*, p164.

customers and managers to be of great importance and, where pay rates were, as a result, higher, men continued to dominate managerial positions. This discrepancy in pay was highlighted by Lancaster when he studied the JLP Census for 1932. Figures identify twice as many men remaining with the company longer and achieving higher rates of pay than women.[118] JSL made no apology for this. He commented:

> Experience, however, has seemed to me to show that the duration of a woman's availability for a really exacting post is generally much shorter than a man's. Some women are able to hold a difficult post steadily through a long lifetime and are in every way as good as a very good man. But Mrs Lewis agrees that our experience has been that, though women tend to live longer than men, the average length of their effective career in a difficult post is much shorter. Therefore men are on the whole to be preferred to women for posts in which long tenure is really important.[119]

With hindsight, JSL may have chosen to rethink the criteria for the recruitment drive in the 1920s. At the time, however, despite evidence that those women who chose to marry often left the business, the recruitment of both single and married women was actively pursued. In 1946, JSL expressed the view that despite having a shorter working career, women could make a contribution to many areas, both within the business and more generally in society. He wrote about his vision and his continuing belief in his early strategy:

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[118] Lancaster, *The Department Store*, p152.

[119] Lewis, *Partnership For All*, p216.

> I believe that at present the world wastes a vast amount of really valuable feminine ability and that the Partnership has gained heavily from the extent to which in making important appointments it has disregarded sex.[120]

Another major attraction of the Partnership as an employer was the policy of actively recruiting married women. Many academics have asserted that the marriage bar initiated by the Civil Service (in 1895) and later adopted by financial institutions, including the Post Office (1921), and Barclays Bank (1926), had a profound effect on the ability of women to rise through the ranks to positions of managerial status. Bruley suggests that 'As the majority of women married by the age of 30 their working lives were rarely more than 12 years'.[121]

The employment of married women in the JLP was to cause serious unrest amongst other staff, particularly at a time when unemployment was rising. On 27 July 1929, JSL responded by saying:

> The Partnership gives an engagement to a married woman if she seems to be the best candidate at the time when the vacancy has to be filled. Having once engaged her, they do their best to make her employment permanent.[122]

By allowing those who were married to join the company and not restricting management positions to those who remained single or were widowed, he increased the attractiveness of the roles on offer to many prospective women recruits. He viewed women's

[120] Ibid., p216.

[121] Bruley, *Women in Britain Since 1900*, p69.

[122] *The Gazette*, 27.7.1929, p429, in JLP Archive.

knowledge of the way in which women wanted to shop, the type of merchandise they wanted to purchase and the environment in which they felt comfortable, as invaluable.[123] The acceptance of married women also allowed those who had previously withdrawn from the labour market to bring up their children to return to work in the company. JSL's wife was a prime example of these returners. There was an acknowledgement that senior Partners with families could provide a good role model for other staff and encourage a feeling of the company as a large family.[124]

Amenities and Benefits

In 1926 JSL acquired the Odney country club near Maidenhead in Berkshire.[125] The club was purchased to provide all Partners with access to the best accommodation, sports and social facilities available. As the Company developed and the number of branches and employees increased, the Odney Club was to provide a central social and sporting venue where employees could meet in their leisure time.[126] As another incentive to attract recruits, the estate was featured in the national press and promotional literature.[127]

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[123] Lewis, J. S., *Partnership For All*, London, Kerr Cross, 1948, p30.

[124] JSL and Sarah Lewis and the two Learners Bernard Miller and his wife Jessica (nee ffoulkes) were examples of couples who both worked for the Partnership. The Millers lived at the Odney Club. Jessica Miller continued to work on a part time/intermittent basis after the birth of her children. Bernard Miller was to take over the Chairmanship from Spedan Lewis on his retirement in 1955. MacPherson, (ed.), *John Spedan Lewis*, p215.

[125] The Odney Club replaced Grove Farm in Harrow where JSL recuperated from his riding accident. When funds were required to pay for the improvements at Peter Jones, he was forced to sell the property, but he was keen to open another amenity centre when the business became more profitable, and he purchased the Odney Club in 1926. Ibid., p145.

[126] The Odney Club in Cookham was designed to house Partners on a permanent basis as well as to provide holiday and recreational facilities. *The Gazette* contains regular articles listing the matches played at the Club throughout the interwar years. For

The family, or weekend party, atmosphere created at the Club was a feature of the Partnership which reflected the mood of the times.[128] It encouraged healthy living and the break up of the working week, which was popular during the 1920s and 1930s.[129] Top sportsmen and women were also attracted to the Partnership by the availability and quality of the facilities. In 1927, Edith Holloway was recruited from Birmingham University, where she had been tennis and hockey captain, and quickly gained promotion to deputy buyer in the new Electrical department. In 1964, she remembered: 'In those days there were many international and county players to be seen at Odney'.[130] She was one of a group of young single woman who found that the Partnership could offer career opportunities, job satisfaction and what could be described as a work/life balance.

Outcomes of the Learnership Scheme

By September 1928 Peter Jones alone had recruited 93 Learners who joined a permanent staff of less than 400. Of these trainees, 21 had left and 40 were listed as selling staff. Four had taken up responsible positions in non-selling departments such as display or the workrooms, whilst three had risen to be Superintendents on the selling floor. Nine were in the Secretariat, performing a variety of clerical roles and five were working in the

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example, *The Gazette,* 5.5.1928, p194, in JLP Archive, gives results of the Tennis Club competition and also the Odney Club Dance.

[127] Brochure, *The Odney Club*, John Lewis Partnership, 1936, A/2834/k.

[128] Benson suggests that the importance of social activities and particularly sport provided women with the opportunity of confronting and challenging the public perception of their role. See Benson, *The Rise of Consumer Society in Britain,* p190.

[129] To encourage healthy living and company loyalty other department stores including Harrods and G H Lee also offered sporting facilities to their staff. Amenities file, 1930-1940, A/242/4, in JLP Archive.

[130] *The Gazette,* 5.9.1964, p797, in JLP Archive.

Intelligence Department, ensuring the Company's 'Never Knowingly Undersold' policy was enforced.[131] The Learners comprised a considerable percentage of the many newly recruited staff, with over half the total number of permanent Peter Jones staff being employed by the Company for less than two years.[132]

The initial decision to recruit middle-class staff to upgrade the management staff at Peter Jones was viewed by JSL as a success. In response to a *Gazette* letter, he confirmed:

> We are having great difficulty in finding room for the large and continually growing stream of highly desirable candidates who are being attracted by the favourable reports of the system that have been spread far and wide by other holders of Learnerships and by their friends. [133]

The number of applicants consistently outnumbered the positions available and the Learnership Scheme became key to the recruitment policy at the shop.[134] The decision of many middle-class educated women to join the JLP in the 1920s was evidently influenced by many factors. Their desire or need to earn a good wage in either the short or longer term, the improvement in shop standards, training and career prospects, combined with the attractions of the social and political ideas being developed by the company at that time, were all contributory factors. The absence of a marriage bar, the encouragement of a family atmosphere and loyalty to the Partnership system, also gave the JLP added benefits which attracted talented and well-educated staff in the years following World War I. What is less obvious is whether the positive features of this

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[131] *The Gazette,* 10.11.1928, p613, in JLP Archive.

[132] Staff list, Census, in Supplement, *The Gazette,* 1928, in JLP Archive.

[133] *The Gazette,* 28.5.1927, p95, in JLP Archive.

[134] Press cuttings relating to the Learnership Scheme. Magazine, journal and newspaper articles, in cutting books, 1925-1946, A/252/i & iia, in JLP Archive.

employment strategy resulted in the long-term retention of career orientated women or whether the recruits were simply interested in short-term well-paid employment. How those who chose to stay adapted to the regime at Peter Jones, and after 1929, at John Lewis Oxford Street, will be discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER TWO
Implementing Change 1918 –1930

New Roles for New Staff

Those recruits who had joined the Company shortly after World War I and had completed their training, were to move into management roles both on, and off, the shop floor in the 1920s and 1930s. This chapter will analyse the development of these managerial roles within Peter Jones and later John Lewis, a development that created opportunities for the increasing number of educated middle-class women employees. It will consider how the introduction and evolution of these new roles became a blueprint for rolling out management positions at Peter Jones, and how it was used to assist in the corporate amalgamation with John Lewis Oxford Street in 1929. This strategy was to be used again in both the later 1930s and 1940, when more provincial department stores were acquired.[135]

The chapter will explore changes in specific roles, including that of buyers. The careers of several recruits who became buyers during this period will be examined to demonstrate the career opportunities they enjoyed. The chapter will also consider the increasing importance, in both pay and status, placed upon employees with clerical skills, as more complex accounting and stock control systems began to be introduced.

[135] Jessops, Lance & Lance, Tyrrell & Green and Knight & Lee were all acquired in the 1930s with the 15 department stores of the Selfridge Provincial group being purchased in 1940. See MacPherson, H. (ed.), *John Spedan Lewis 1885-1963,* London, John Lewis Partnership, 1985, ps170-171.

Review of Buyers and Managers at Peter Jones

Until 1918 Peter Jones had retained the traditional system of employing a buyer for each department. JSL described the existing role of buyers in 1904, when he entered the business, in his first book, *Partnership For All:*

> The role of Buyer was almost always filled by promotion from the Rank and File. The weakness of their bargaining position made that far the cheapest way… If the man (no Buyership was ever given to a woman) thus promoted made a good impression, he would be offered at or somewhere before the end of his first five years a fresh engagement for a further five. This might begin at one hundred and sixty pounds, or if the impression had been very good, at two hundred pounds but the jump from one set of terms to the next would hardly be higher than this and the step from year to year would be again about ten or twenty pounds.[136]

Although the role of buyer was one of the few managerial roles within the hierarchy of department stores, the buyers at Peter Jones and Oxford Street had been poorly paid. Their salaries were bolstered by commission, which boosted the amount buyers received at the more profitable Oxford Street shop. However, between 1906 and 1913 sales at Peter Jones had been poor, with little opportunity for commission. JSL considered that all Peter Jones buyers had been underpaid in the period prior to his take-over of the shop, and in 1913 began a series of increases which continued over the next ten years.[137] Although he suggested that buyers' pay should be related to sales, he introduced a minimum wage, ensuring that none were paid less than £300 per annum.[138] These pay

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[136] Lewis, J.S., *Partnership For All,* London, Kerr Cross, 1948, p8.

[137] For confirmation of salary levels in excess of £300 see Buyers' Agreements, 1913, A/86, and Peter Jones Wages Ledgers, 1914-1928, A/106, in John Lewis Partnership Archive, Stevenage, (JLP Archive).

[138] Personal file, Wise, no date, A/636/fi, in JLP Archive.

increases were matched by corresponding increases through the various ranks of selling assistants and this, combined with improved conditions, were major reasons for the decision of staff in the Chelsea shop not to take industrial action when their colleagues at Oxford Street went on strike in 1920.[139]

Pay was only one issue under review at Peter Jones, with changes in the rules and amenities at the Chelsea shop also contributing to a better relationship between management and the buyers. Those achieving this rank at Peter Jones were treated very differently from the rest of the staff, with shorter working hours, twenty seven days paid holiday, fewer rules and regulations and a large degree of autonomy.[140] JSL believed that the buyers' traditional role, which had involved one buyer being responsible for purchasing stock for only one shop should be expanded, enabling buyers to purchase stock for all JLP stores. The former job had required a breadth of knowledge and skills combining staff management, display and stock control which JSL considered reduced their effectiveness in the specific buying function, which he felt was the key to the success of the business:

> Hitherto, their positions, like most bits of the organisation in the Drapery trade, have been a regular muddle. They have been partly Staff Managers, partly leading Saleswomen or Salesmen.[141]

Previously the buyers had been in charge of large budgets and were directly responsible to the Board for their turnover and sales. The number of departments within the shop had been small, with each buyer responsible for large areas of the shop floor and a wide range

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[139] MacPherson, (ed.), *John Spedan Lewis,* p153.

[140] *The Gazette*, 15.2.1919, p226, in JLP Archive.

[141] Ibid., p222.

of merchandise. This led to the employment of a range of non-selling staff to fulfil some of the minor administrative functions that formed part of the buyer's role. Display assistants, city matchers[142] and clerical staff worked alongside the selling staff on the more mundane jobs for which the buyer was responsible. These roles were often gender specific, with men working as city matchers and women more usually recruited as clerical staff.[143]

New Management Structure

In the 1920s the Peter Jones management structure developed both horizontally, creating positions of similar status across a range of jobs, and also vertically, by the introduction of higher and lower ranking managerial positions as shown in Figures 1 & 2 below. The expansion strategy continued offering existing managers the opportunity to move into more specialised selling and non-selling functions, and created vacancies by breaking down roles creating more junior managerial positions. There were more specialist buyers, each responsible for a smaller merchandise assortment, shop floor managers, non-selling managers and clerical departments.[144]

[142] Information about the role of city matchers can be found in Ely, V., *Fifty Years Hard, Elys of Wimbledon*, Frome, The Linen & Woollen Drapers and Cottage Homes, 1976, p32.

[143] Census, Supplement to *The Gazette*, 1924, p25, in JLP Archive, gives number of clerical staff as 75 with 15 men and 60 women (4 married, 56 single).

[144] Job titles appeared and disappeared as management structure and responsibilities altered over time. These changes are covered in *The Gazette*, 1918-1950, in JLP Archive.

Figure 1 - Organisational Structure of Peter Jones c1918

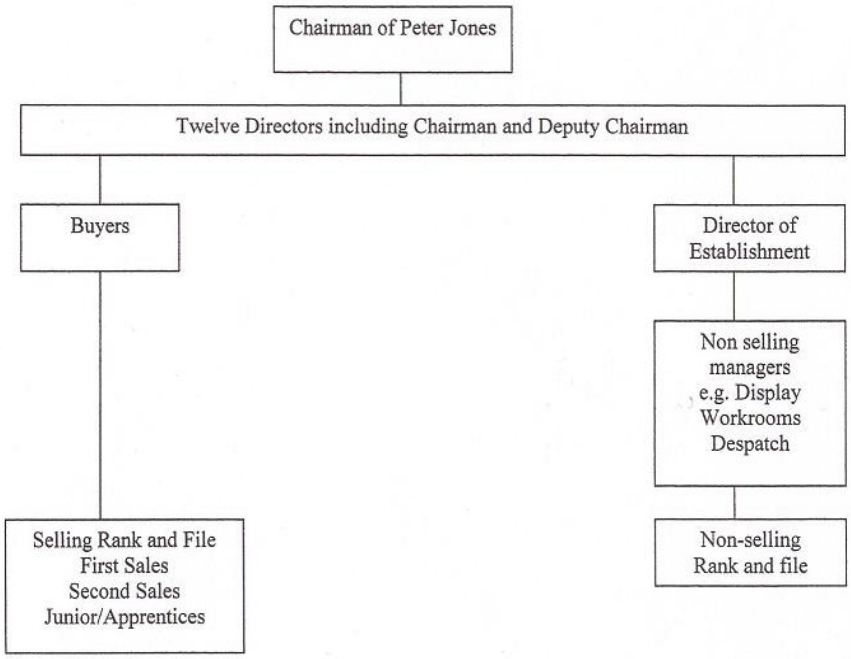
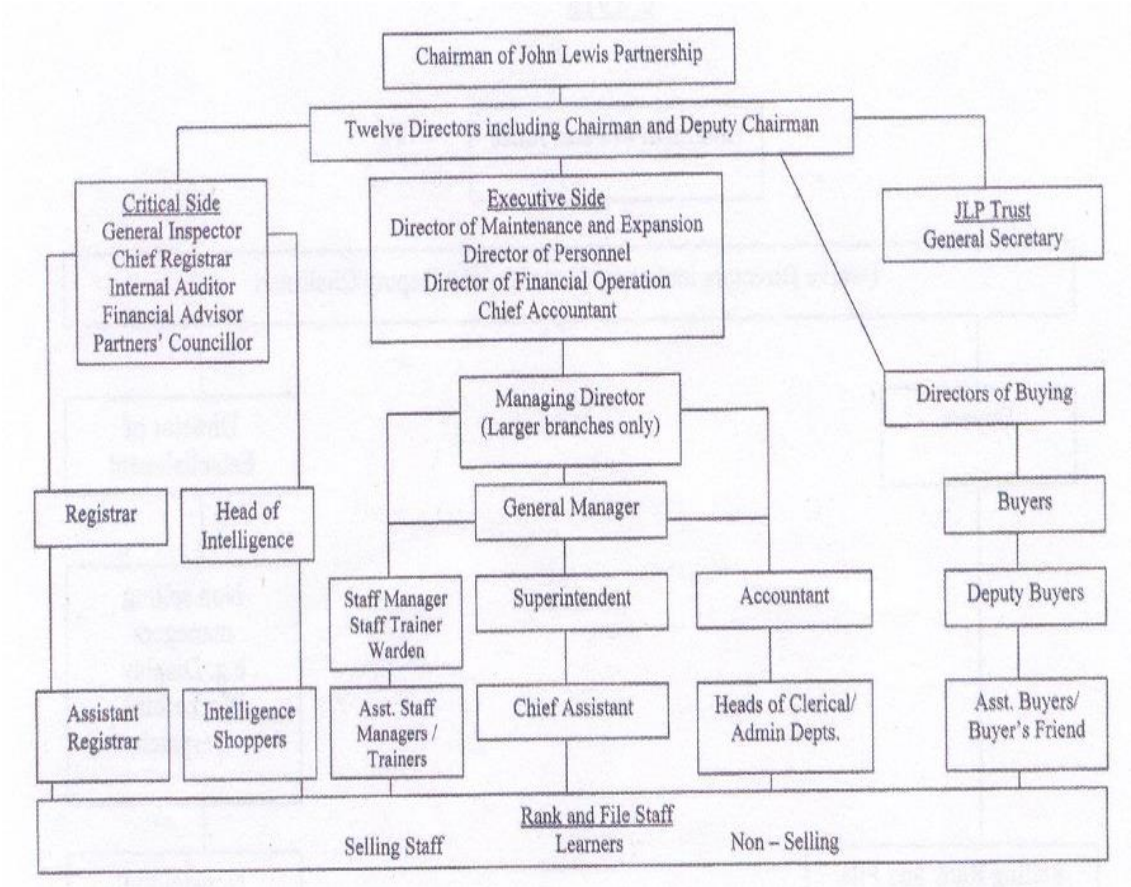


Figure 2 - Organisational Structure of John Lewis Partnership c1935



The development of these roles was mirrored in other department stores both in Britain and the US,[145] but the Peter Jones reorganisation did not follow this model and differed from other department stores in one major way. In Lewis's Ltd and other shops, including Harrods and Selfridges in Britain and Filene in the US, buyers were encouraged to devote more time to the shop floor selling function.[146] In Peter Jones the buyers were removed from the day to day operations in the shop, allowing them to concentrate on the buying function. This specialisation was to lead to centralised buying, which was first introduced in 1927.[147] By then JSL had agreed to return to work with his father at Oxford Street and began to implement the idea that individual buyers should control the stocks for both John Lewis Oxford Street and Peter Jones. This system was not repeated in many other British department stores at this time. In other retail organisations the role of buyer generally evolved in a similar way to that in the US, with buyers retaining overall charge of their departments.

1. The Refined Buying Function

Role of Buyer

The buyer's role had been under review by the Peter Jones management since 1918, when poorly performing buyers were replaced with those JSL felt would adapt to his new

[145] Briggs, A., *Friends of the People. The Centenary History of Lewis's, etc.,* London, Batsford, 1956, p149; Porter Benson, S., *Counter Cultures: Saleswomen, Managers and Customers in American Department Stores 1890-1940,* Illinois, University of Illinois Press, 1985, p66.

[146] Porter Benson, *Counter Cultures,* p60.

[147] The traditional buying role involved one buyer being responsible for purchasing stock for only one shop, but JSL expanded the responsibility of his buyers to purchase stock for all JLP stores. See MacPherson, (ed.), *John Spedan Lewis,* p157.

ideas.[148] The buyers were only responsible for the purchase and stock turnover of their merchandise, freeing them from the requirement to remain on the shop floor, enabling them to visit suppliers and purchase the best merchandise for their department.[149] All shop floor duties were removed from their job description in 1919, following the re-allocation of non-selling functions into new autonomous departments, each headed up by a junior manager.[150]

The positions were filled by two very different groups of employees. One group of buyers, comprising many women, were relatively new to the company, having been recruited after 1918 for their social and educational excellence. The other group, mainly dominated by men, had been with the Company for a longer period and had acquired experience and knowledge of the stock, but often did not possess the cultural skills of the first group.[151]

JSL rapidly increased the buyers' salaries over the next fifteen years. For example, the salary of the Peter Jones Costume Buyer, Flora Payne, in 1907 was £100 p.a. By 1913 this figure had not changed and Miss Payne left the Company (no reason given).[152] By 1928 Miss Gertrude Parrett, who had joined Peter Jones as a Learner in 1925 at a salary of £200 p.a., had been promoted to Buyer, Umbrellas, at a salary of £500 p.a.[153]

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[148] Ibid., p106.

[149] Lewis, *Partnership For All*, p115.

[150] JSL memorandum no. 9102, 12.5.1927, in JLP Archive.

[151] Baker, H., (ed.), *Retail Trading*, London, John Lewis Partnership, 1964, p75.

[152] Peter Jones Wages Ledger, 1914 – 1928, A/402, folio 81, in JLP Archive.

[153] Personal file, Parrett, no date, A/2497/h(i), in JLP Archive. Also JSL memorandum 30.8.1926, in Baker, (ed.), *Retail Trading*, p85, confirms the replacement of existing buyers with new ones before 1920.

Learners, like Gertrude Parrett, were often brought into a department as trainees to enable then to work with and learn from the existing buyer. However, there is evidence that not all buyers were happy to accept the new blood and some made it difficult for the Learners to obtain the training they required.[154] They saw the Learners as inexperienced, overpaid staff who were being fast tracked through the system, often leapfrogging more experienced staff with whom the buyers had developed a close working relationship.[155] The range of departments into which the Learners were sent for their training was limited. Some departments, such as gowns or ladies' outerwear, were thought to be particularly suitable. This put more strain on the internal economy of the buyer and chief assistant in charge of that group of merchandise, whose staffing costs were inflated by the high salaries paid to the trainees.[156] To off-set this tension JSL met some of the costs of the trainees from his own funds.[157] On the other hand during the 1920s and 30s fashion departments were increasing in size and assortment to accommodate new and cheaper ready to wear clothes.[158] The resultant increase in sales forced the store to develop more departments for women's clothing and required a correspondingly swift increase in the number of managers and buyers who had experience of this part of the store's trade. The Learners were able to provide new managers in this merchandise group. However, it was not just the newer fashion based departments into which Learners were to be promoted. The decision to encourage experts in particular specialist merchandise provided a new

[154] JSL memorandum no. 10213, 13.1.1928, in JLP Archive.

[155] 'Promotion From Our Own Ranks', *The Gazette*, 26.1.1924, p15, in JLP Archive.

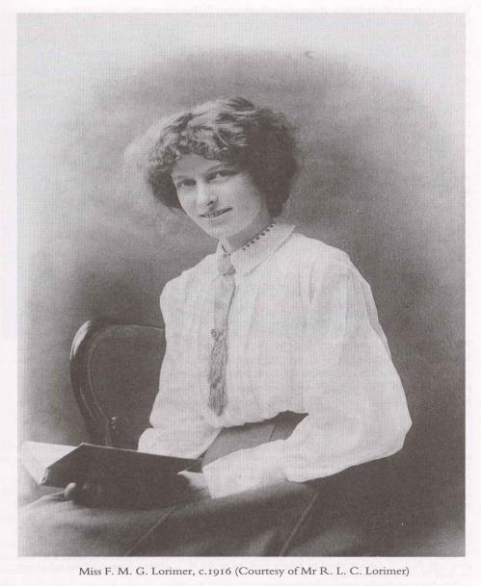
[156] *The Gazette*, 2.4.1927, p468, in JLP Archive.

[157] Ibid., 20.7.1929, p429.

[158] Jefferys, J., *Retail Trading in Britain, 1850-1950*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1954, p332.

avenue for academics and business men and women who had never previously been recruited into retailing.

Miss Florence Lorimer was one of the Learners who had a special skill which resulted in her recruitment into the buying staff at Peter Jones. A graduate of Somerville College, where she was a contemporary of JSL's wife, Lorimer joined the Partnership in 1925. After working at the British Museum, and accompanying the explorer and archaeologist Gertrude Stein on expeditions abroad, she joined Peter Jones, bringing with her a wide and deep knowledge of the antiquities of the middle and far east, which at that time were particularly popular and fashionable.[159]



Miss F. M. G. Lorimer, c.1916 (Courtesy of Mr R. L. C. Lorimer)

Figure 3. Photograph of F Lorimer, c1916, A/4297/b, in JLP Archive.

Acknowledgement to the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society,* 1998.

Despite Lorimer's lack of knowledge of department store systems or any family connections in retailing, JSL felt her education and social background combined with a knowledge of the countries where the stock could be purchased would be invaluable. Lorimer was given a short grounding in the business before being given the job of visiting the Punjab, Kashmir and Afghanistan to purchase items which she felt would sell

[159] *The Gazette*, 13.6.1998, p511, in JLP Archive.

in the department store. She was given £5,500 and was away for eight months. On her return the stock she had purchased was sold in the shop and she was given the title of Buyer, Oriental Carpets and Fancy Goods at a salary of £750 p.a. Another trip was planned, but was postponed when she married. She continued to work until a bout of ill health led to her resignation and her return to academic work at the Royal Asiatic Society in 1932.[160]

Lorimer was just the type of exceptional woman JSL was looking for in his quest for the best buyers. He was also keenly aware of the value of the network of social contacts amongst his customers at Peter Jones. To exploit these, he recruited Mrs Elspeth Fox Pitt, who, like Lorimer, joined as a Learner in 1925.[161] Already well known as a 'premiere vendeuse',[162] she brought to the store a considerable amount of personal custom for her designer gowns and other items of women's clothing. Her social contacts were thought, by the management and JSL in particular, to be of great value to the store, and she was encouraged to run her gown showroom as a separate shop within the store. This brought her into conflict with other fashion buyers who felt she was being given an unfair advantage.[163]

Her numerous contacts also allowed her to greatly increase the amount she earned through the personal connection scheme. By 1927 her list of contacts exceeded 4000, with many of her customers from the upper class. Some of these titled ladies were

[160] JSL memorandum no. 6538, 7.4.1925, in JLP Archive.

[161] Ibid., no.6848, 15.12.1925.

[162] Ibid. This term was used to describe those women with high class selling techniques and contacts.

[163] Ibid., no. 7625, 27.9.1926.

recruited by Mrs Fox Pitt to join her at Peter Jones.[164] She was encouraged to take these women on as Learners to work with her to help them gain experience at the higher end of the costume trade.[165] This was a visible acknowledgement of the rise in social status which Peter Jones had achieved in the 1920s. Mrs Fox Pitt remained at Peter Jones until 1932.[166]

However, the practice of bringing in and then moving trainees was not universally popular with other buyers, who were not always willing to spend time training new recruits who would be moved on to other merchandise groups and would not provide the existing buyers with the benefit of their labour.[167]

As the Learners became more experienced through their training, both in house and by visiting other establishments,[168] they were promoted. They sometimes replaced the buyers Lewis felt were not responding to the new demands of the business.[169] As the Census of 1932 confirms, not all recruits or existing staff were felt to meet the standards JSL expected. This contributed to the continuing high level of staff turnover and placed both new and existing staff under considerable pressure. Many of the new recruits were not able to move directly into the demanding role of buyer. They required more training and the opportunity to gain further knowledge of the operation of a large retail store.

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[164] Ibid., no. 8667, 25.3.1927.

[165] Ibid., no. 7102, 27.4.1926.

[166] Ibid., no. 15501, 12.4.1932.

[167] Ibid., nos. 10213, 13.1.1928; 10310, 31.1.1928.

[168] S. B.M. Lewis memoranda, 1922, A/3838, in JLP Archive, confirms that part of her training as a Learner in 1922 was to work at a London boot and shoe makers to learn the manufacturing and wholesale business.

[169] Personal file, Parrett, no date, A/2497/h(i), in JLP Archive. Memorandum reporting on her movement to a department whose previous Buyer was considered, by management, to be unsatisfactory.

Therefore, by 1923 a new junior buying role had been introduced, with assistant buyers' roles providing stepping stones for talented individuals.

Assistant Buyers

The role of assistant buyer was considered ideal for Learners who had responded well to their initial training on the shop floor as sales assistants, and who were thought by JSL and the buyer to possess the qualities of taste, style and business acumen which would be suitable for promotion to this role. At a salary of around £200 p.a., they moved considerably above the Learnership rate of £150 p.a.[170] This was paid as a salary, rather than relying on the Remuneration Account system. Assistant buyers' range of duties varied dramatically from department to department and once again JSL was not convinced that they were all receiving the correct training for their future role. He commented:

> In my view Assistant Buyers are given very little more than particular Assistants to whom the Buyer chooses to give certain vague and varying functions of the nature of personal assistance.[171]

As it developed during the 1920s, the role involved helping the buyer with the day to day operation of placing orders, checking stock as it arrived, ensuring it was priced correctly and displayed as soon as possible. Learners and other educated women were recruited to these positions, as it was felt that they possessed the qualities required for operating the complex systems being developed. As sales were recorded, returns were required to ascertain the speed at which the stock had been sold, any problems with the quality and price, and liasing with the manufacturers and wholesalers. It was only in very rare

[170] Personal file, Blackmore, no date, A/2461/d, in JLP Archive.

[171] JSL memorandum no. 5352, 20.9.1923, in JLP Archive.

instances that the assistant buyers were given the power to place orders themselves, and their responsibilities were limited to the degree to which the buyer was willing to relinquish their authority.[172]

In 1924 the job title of these trainee buyers was changed to that of deputy buyer. They began to be given more authority to work in the absence of the buyer and became responsible for small amounts of buying. Large buyerships were split into smaller ones, providing new opportunities for experienced trainees. By 1927 the first steps were taken to allow some senior buyers to buy merchandise for both Peter Jones and John Lewis.[173] To provide support for these important positions, and also to help support junior buyers, other roles, again thought very suitable for the Learners, were created and were given the titles of Buyer's Friend or Buyer's Secretary. Both of these roles were similar in content to the work previously undertaken by the assistant buyers, providing more information for the buyer, undertaking clerical and administrative tasks or visiting suppliers and wholesalers. There was also a rise in the number of departments as the assortment increased in areas such as Decorated Furniture (1923) and estate agency (1924).[174] As the size of the buying operation developed it was matched by a corresponding growth in the number of management positions available for those on the shop floor.

2. Selling Managers

[172] *The Gazette*, 21.3.1925, p45, in JLP Archive.

[173] Personal file, MacDermott, no date, A/502/j, in JLP Archive. See also JSL memoranda nos. 5762; 5770; 5823, 1924, in JLP Archive.

[174] *The Gazette*, 1924, p263, in JLP Archive.

Chief Assistants

The first in a series of initiatives to create new managers with day to day control over the running of the selling departments involved the introduction of the post of Chief Assistant. These posts created a new tier of managers who were to be recruited as 'people who really are first class players for that particular place in our team'.[175] JSL suggested that this new tier of management would:

> enable the Company to employ, without any drawback, in Buyerships people whose temperament is excellent for the true work of a Buyer and not really suitable for maintenance of efficiency in petty routine and the exercise of authority.[176]

Chief Assistants were first reported in *The Gazette* of 15 February 1919. There were 139 trading staff across the shop and from these nine senior sales staff were selected to undertake the new role. They included three women who were placed in charge of china and glass, boots and shoes, and the haberdashery department. They had been employed for eight years, four years and one year respectively. One of the men promoted had been employed at Peter Jones for less than six months.[177] This was the first time that women had moved into managerial roles on the shop floor, apart from buyerships.[178]

Following the success of the initial set, chief assistants were introduced into other departments in the store. They worked in conjunction with the buyer to ensure stock was displayed, ticketed and sold. They were directly responsible for the day to day running of

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[175] Lewis, *Partnership For All*, p225.

[176] Ibid., p222.

[177] Census, Supplement to *The Gazette,* 1919, in JLP Archive.

[178] Ibid., 15.2.1919. As noted above, Buyers had been promoted from within with no opportunity for young, relatively inexperienced women to undertake any managerial role.

the department and for all customer-related and staffing matters. Chief assistants were required to report weekly to JSL on the sales for their department and at the end of each half year were required to provide information on the performance of each assistant and any reason for the fluctuation in sales figures. They could recommend the removal of staff and allocate duties whilst being expected to serve customers and maintain high standards of shop keeping.[179] This created opposition among some long-serving buyers who found it hard to adjust to the new structure. In response to these issues, JSL wrote in *The Gazette* of 13 December 1919:

> The Buyer should give to the Chief Assistant general directions, but leave the departmental detail absolutely to the Chief Assistant. This means that authority over the Selling Staff is withdrawn from the Buyers and concentrated on the Chief Assistants. The Buyers are apt to dislike this.[180]

Superintendents

By the mid 1920s the position of chief assistant had expanded to provide new opportunities for experienced Learners who enjoyed life on the shop floor. Those who had reached to position of chief assistant could now take the next step to the post of superintendent. The role provided managers with a supervisory role, giving them authority over several departments. Floor walkers, a traditional position within the department store, continued to be employed.[181] However, unlike floor walkers,

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[179] Ibid.

[180] Ibid., ps626-7.

[181] Floor walkers can be identified in photograph of John Lewis Oxford Street silk department taken in the early 1930s. MacPherson, (ed.), *John Spedan Lewis*, p60; see also Lancaster, B., *The Department Store: A Social History*, Leicester, Leicester University Press, 1995, p129.

superintendents were not only there to direct customers, but to liase with the chief assistants under their control, ensuring staff cover was adequate, to supervise cash desks, ensure displays were changed, that their area of the shop was well presented and to maintain a close watch on the staff to identify talent or any problems which might occur.[182]

3. Non-Selling Managers

Non-selling managers covered areas of the business such as display, despatch and the workrooms, where experienced and long serving staff continued to be promoted from within. They were also mainly departments which did not involve direct contact with customers. Non-selling managers were not required to possess the cultural or educational requirements senior management expected in the selling departments and, therefore, were not often used to train Learners.[183] These departments could be staffed by cheaper, less well educated, workers.[184] From the Census of staff carried out annually, the much broader mix in length of service within these departments can be seen. For example, in the Peter Jones Census of 1919 the largest group of staff with over ten years service was to be found in the workrooms and ten years later this was still the case. [185]

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[182] Role of Superintendents listed in JSL memoranda nos. 5000, 13.2.1923; 6628, 18.7.1925; 8538, 8.3.1927, in JLP Archive.

[183] JSL memorandum 7.2.1944, in Baker, (ed.), *Retail Trading*, p70.

[184] This indicates the shops employed a similar mix of workers by class and education as suggested by Holcombe in Holcombe, L., *Victorian Ladies At Work: Middle-Class Working Women in England and Wales 1850-1914*, Hampden, Archon Press, 1973, p 117. See also thesis page 3.

[185] In 1919 5 staff in the workrooms and maintenance department at Peter Jones had been employed there for over 10 years (4 female, 1 male) with only 1 of the trading staff having worked for that period. Total number of staff is given as 396. This did not include temporary and casual staff. See Census, Supplements to *The Gazette*,1919, and 1929 in JLP Archive.

4.Organisational Departments

Clerical and Secretarial Work

Clerical and secretarial work within the shop increased substantially over the period 1919-1931.[186] Despite also having a non-selling function, these departments were considered of higher status than the workrooms.[187] However, many senior sales staff felt their status was above that of the clerical staff who provided the administrative backup for their departments.[188] Those applying for clerical positions were expected to be educated above the elementary level.[189] These departments were heavily gender-biased, with only 19 men listed in the Clerical section of the 1927 Census against 168 women.[190] Some names listed in the Census can be identified as Learners who had completed their training and moved into this type of work. By 1927 six female graduates were listed in the Clerical section of the Census. They were given supervisory roles and included Miss Glenn, a Stock Controller (later promoted to General Manager Peter Jones); Miss Wailes who, as Warden, was responsible for welfare provision, and Miss Cornish who was Establishment Manager, responsible for the recruitment and training of Learners.[191] All

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[186] Comparison in Census, Supplements to *The Gazette,* 1919 and 1931, in JLP Archive.

[187] Anderson, G., 'Introduction', in Anderson, G.(ed.), *The White Blouse Revolution: Women Clerical Workers Since 1870*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1988, p10.

[188] Lancaster, *The Department Store*, p139.

[189] For the re-organisation of clerical departments and the qualities expected of the staff, see JSL memorandum no. 6326, 26.3.1925, in JLP Archive.

[190] Census, Supplement to *The Gazette*, 1927, in JLP Archive.

[191] Ibid.

had been recruited within the previous four years. The list also included Learners who had been recruited for their social connections, or who had a particular skill for which they were included in the scheme.[192]

During the 1920s the Counting House was the main accounting department for the shop and was sub-divided into various sections, including sales and stock accounting, bought ledger and credit management. Throughout the period covered by this thesis this department was headed by a qualified male accountant. Other clerical departments were created to assist the sales and buying teams and to provide other information and statistical records, which could be used to plan sales and buying strategies. Learners continued to be placed in these non-selling departments throughout the interwar years, where they were able to develop analytical and accountancy skills that were in demand as internal systems increased in number and complexity.[193]

The Intelligence Department

In 1926, the management of Peter Jones decided to create a department that would specialise in locating competition and analyse their prices to ensure the shop was offering the widest variety of stock at the most competitive prices. Previously the role of checking prices had been part of the job of the Stock Controller (a description of this role is given below). The department was created to ensure the shop was able to adhere to the 'Never Knowingly Undersold' slogan, which had been adopted the previous year. This

[192] Ibid.

[193] Report in Development file, 1929, A/89, in JLP Archive, for an example of these systems. The Colourdex system was introduced in 1928/9.

slogan was being actively promoted, along with another which described Peter Jones as, 'The best value in London and the most obliging staff'.[194]

Items were selected by the Stock Controller or Buyer, who then requested an investigation by the Intelligence Department to ascertain the quality and price of similar stock elsewhere. This required a number of 'mystery shoppers'[195] and administrators to ensure the lowest prices were offered in Peter Jones. The Intelligence Department, where these staff were based, employed educated middle-class women, as they were able to shop without detection by the competitors they visited, and could fulfil the administrative tasks required to implement any price changes which resulted from their investigations. The senior manager who was in overall charge of the department, the Director of Goodwill, suggested: 'the Intelligence Department will prove a most useful training ground for Partners who are ambitious'. He added that their 'general outlook is not that of an expert, but rather of the discriminating customer'.[196] These three non-selling areas of the business saw great change in the 1930s and the growth of staff management, staff training and welfare provision will be covered in detail in chapters three and four.

5. Senior Management Re-organisation

With the creation of new non-selling departments, such as Intelligence, and new selling departments, including electrical and sports, it was considered important to ensure that

[194] MacPherson, (ed.), *John Spedan Lewis*, p153.

[195] JSL memorandum no. 7222a, 25.5.1926, in JLP Archive. Mystery shoppers were women who posed as customers and visited the Partnership's opposition to compare stock prices.

[196] *The Gazette*, 14.1.1928, p494, in JLP Archive.

the management structure could adapt to the need to increase the number of trained staff.[197]

Some roles remained at level they had previously held. For example, despite losing some of their day to day responsibilities, buyers were still considered by JSL to have a unique position, and were the key to the continued success of the shop. In 1926 he wrote:

> The work of the Buyers affects more conspicuously and perhaps more considerably the prosperity of a business of our kind than does the work of any other section of the staff.[198]

Chief assistants and other non-selling managers also had their roles clearly defined, but a new tier of management was deemed necessary to tie them together with the buyers. The late 1920s and early 1930s saw the gradual introduction of senior management brought in to liaise between the buyers and junior managers, a development that was also common in similar stores in the US in the first half of the twentieth century.[199] These senior managers removed some of the administrative burden which fell on the selling staff, and provided information to Directors on the results experienced in all departments. They were able to highlight any potential problems, but also to draw attention to any department which was producing consistently good results.[200]

Stock Controllers and Merchandise Managers

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[197] Figures 1 & 2 p50 illustrate the increased complexity of the structure which developed over the period 1918 to 1935.

[198] JSL memorandum 30.8.1926, in Baker, (ed.), *Retail Trading,* p68.

[199] Porter Benson, *Counter Cultures*, p59.

[200] JSL complimented the EL (Electrical) department on the high sales reported by the Stock Controller. See *The Gazette,* 21.1.1928, p397, in JLP Archive.

Stock controllers had been in place in the shop for several years before the major overhaul of the management structure of Peter Jones was begun in 1918.[201] They reported to the buyers, providing them with information on stock levels, pricing and availability.[202] The role, although of management status, was not considered of equivalent rank to that of buyer. The main focus of the job was to maintain a check on the prices of stock which was sold at Peter Jones, comparing it against the prices charged for the same item by their competitors.

As forerunners of the Intelligence department, their role gained higher status in December 1919, changing their title to merchandise managers. The smaller, less influential role they had previously undertaken was split between a more administrative stock control role and the value testing of the Intelligence Department. Both departments were used by Learners who were looking for new positions of responsibility after they had finished their initial training and by 1927 there were several, who had been promoted from Buyers, holding this position.[203] Some of these were women and included two former Learners.[204]

The role was one which was becoming popular in many London stores as well as in the US.[205] JSL commented on the way their competitor Bourne & Hollingsworth were using merchandise managers to monitor spending levels, and was impressed with the role they

[201] The job title was then Goods Secretary, but the role was to assess the stock levels within various departments. See JSL memorandum no. 266, 5.1.1917, in JLP Archive.

[202] *The Gazette*, 9.7.1927, p186, in JLP Archive.

[203] Job description of Stock Controller given in Oral interview, Murphy, A/Oral/Murphy, 2004, in JLP Archive.

[204] JSL memorandum no. 9491, 15.7.1927, in JLP Archive.

[205] Porter Benson, *Counter Cultures*, p52.

played in the control of stock.[206] In Bourne & Hollingsworth, as in Peter Jones, merchandise managers countersigned invoices, assessed the results of figures produced in the departments and produced reports for buyers and directors on the level of stock holding, age of stock and rate of turnover. The merchandise managers controlled the figures for several junior departments and were considered by the directors to rank alongside the more experienced buyers, with authority over buyers with less experience or smaller assortments.[207]

The merchandise managers' high degree of control over the buyers who purchased stock for their departments did lead to some ill will. Memoranda between JSL and one merchandise manager, Mrs Fowle, in 1927, indicate the degree of dissatisfaction between her and a buyer regarding her delay passing of invoices for payment and illustrates the conflict which existed in some departments.[208] Before the introduction of this new tier of management the autonomy of buyers had not been questioned. Some buyers viewed Merchandise Managers as controlling, or at least influencing, their main task. However, the control of orders was only part of the job of merchandise managers. Another was the collection and dissemination of information gathered from the records of purchases. Such figures had not been rigorously collected previously and they provided information used to determine the efficiency of the buyer and the sales team in each department. They were then assembled and retained in the Partnership's library, where a dossier on each department was held to record important information gathered about the figures, stock levels and other items such as advertising and staffing.[209]

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[206] JSL memorandum no. 8306, 26.9.1927, in JLP Archive.

[207] Ibid.

[208] Ibid., no. 9687, 26.9.1927.

[209] Ibid., no.10198, 10.1.1928.

General Manager, Peter Jones

A new role of General Manager was created in December 1922[210] to oversee the day to day running of the shop and to improve standards where this was required. With a large amount of responsibility and a considerable budget, it was also a job into which only Learners with exceptional ability were placed.[211]

Of similar status to a buyership, this role was open to both men and women, but one of the most successful General Managers at Peter Jones in the 1920s was a former Learner, Laura Bowen. She was interviewed in the *Daily Mail* of 26 February 1930, after being promoted to the post at the age of 24.

TUESDAY. The Evening News FEBRUARY 25. 1930.

WOMAN APPOINTED GENERAL MANAGER OF BIG LONDON STORE.

ALL IN THREE YEARS.

FROM UNIVERSITY TO STORES CHIEF.

A WOMAN'S TRIUMPH.

"MY JOB IS KEEPING THE MACHINERY OILED."

The Daily Mail
Carmelite House, Carmelite Street, E.C.4.
Cutting from issue dated 26 Feb 1930

GIRL GENERAL MANAGER.

BIG POST AT 24.

"MEN ARE EASY TO WORK WITH."

At the age of only 24, Miss Laura Bowen, a slim brunette, has been appointed general manager of Messrs. Peter Jones, the drapery and furnishing store, Sloane-square, S.W.

A little more than three years ago Miss Bowen joined the firm as secretary to the buyer in the furnishing sec-

Miss Bowen, the new general manager of Peter Jones, Ltd.

Three short years ago Miss Laura Bowen was a student at London University—a student with ambitions and aspirations.

Now they have made her general manager of Peter Jones, Ltd., the drapers and furnishers, whose store is in Sloane-square. So are some of her ambitions and aspirations realised.

Miss Bowen—who is tall and dark and slender and has smiling grey eyes and a manner that tells you how competent she must surely be—talked to an *Evening News* correspondent to-day about those ambitions of hers and about her new post.

Up the Ladder.

Daily Sketch
200 Gray's Inn Road, W.C.1, & Withy Grove, Manchester.
Cutting from issue dated 26 FEB 1930 19

"MISS GENERAL MANAGER"
Important Business Post for Pretty Girl Student

A pretty, dark-haired girl, Miss Laura Bowen, who three years ago was a student at London University, has been appointed general

Figure 4. 'Woman Appointed General Manager of Big London Store',

***The Evening News,* 25.2.1930, A/252/3/ii folio 12, in JLP Archive.**

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[210] *The Gazette*, 30.12.1922, p154, in JLP Archive.

[211] JSL memoranda nos. 12675, 19.3.1930 and 7733/a, 22.10.1926, in JLP Archive.

She remarked:

> I had always aspired to an administrative post. I meant to go into the Civil Service when I left university, but as things have turned out I had to earn my own living at once and could not afford the time necessary to pass the examination.[212]

Her rapid promotion was reported in the media as a remarkable achievement for a young woman. She was interviewed for newspapers across the country and as far away as *The New Zealand Herald*.[213] These articles provided excellent publicity for the Learnership Scheme, which was not otherwise advertised in the media.

The role of General Manager was extended to all branches during the 1930s and 1940s. In smaller provincial branches it was to become the most senior management position, whilst in the larger shops, Peter Jones and John Lewis, the General Manager was subordinate to the Managing Director.[214]

The managerial changes, both on and off the shop floor, which were first introduced into Peter Jones in 1918 began to be rolled out across the company when JSL took over complete control of Oxford Street in 1928. The second John Lewis store on Oxford Street (purchased 1926), which was located adjacent to the original premises, required extensive renovation and the movement of departments between the original 'West' shop and this new 'East' House took many months to complete. By 1931 most of the major internal managerial changes JSL and his management team had undertaken had been

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[212] Newspaper coverage in Magazine, journal and newspaper articles, in cutting books, 1925-1946, A/252/i & iia, in JLP Archive.

[213] Ibid.

[214] Organisational chart in frontispiece, Lewis, *Partnership For All*.

implemented across the three shops. The business then began to move into a new phase, which was to include the acquisition of four provincial department stores, Jessops of Nottingham (1933), Lance & Lance of Weston-Super-Mare (1933), Knight & Lee of Southsea (1934) and Tyrrell & Green of Southampton (1934).[215] One of the other challenges which the business undertook during the 1930s was the complete rebuilding of Peter Jones, which had been planned since 1926. The next chapter will explore the opportunities for the Learners and other middle-class female staff in the Partnership shops during the 1930s.

[215] MacPherson, (ed.), *John Spedan Lewis*, p162.

CHAPTER THREE

Expansion in the Provinces 1930-1939

This chapter will investigate the changes in the opportunities available to middle-class women managers in the 1930s, following the death of John Lewis (senior). Policy change, coupled with the change in the legal identity of the Company in 1929,[216] were to herald a new and aggressive period of redevelopment of existing department stores and the acquisition of new shops. This acquisition policy was to see the number of stores in the group rising from three in 1931 to twenty-two by September 1940,[217] and included the acquisition of the Waitrose grocery chain in 1937.[218]

This period of expansion resulted in JSL's withdrawal from the day to day running of the business, giving him the opportunity to devote most of his time to the acquisition of new businesses and the rebuilding of Peter Jones and Oxford Street. Despite the continuing involvement of Mrs Lewis, recruitment and promotion policies were dominated by male directors who increasingly introduced male ex-service personnel to compete for the managerial positions which arose.[219]

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[216] The private limited company became a Partnership Trust in 1929. See MacPherson, H. (ed.), *John Spedan Lewis 1885-1963,* London, John Lewis Partnership, 1985, p159.

[217] *The Gazette,* 28.9.1940, p663, in John Lewis Partnership Archive (JLP Archive), Stevenage.

[218] MacPherson, (ed.), *John Spedan Lewis,* p166. See also various articles, *The Gazette,* 1937, in JLP Archive, for full details of the acquisition of this chain of 15 grocery shops.

[219] MacPherson, (ed.), *John Spedan Lewis*, p110.

The chapter will investigate whether it is possible to discern an increasing gender bias within the management of departments across the shops. It will seek to identify any movement in favour of new female managers, as well as areas where promotion was restricted to male recruits and existing employees. It will consider whether, during this period, the Learnership Scheme was replaced by a return to the more traditional system of recruitment through personal contact or recommendation,[220] or if increasing numbers of existing female staff began to be promoted from within the Company. Finally, the specialist departments created to administer the changes to staffing policy will be identified, as the Company entered the turbulent trading period of World War II.

Acquisition and Rebuilding

The development of a provincial trade and increasing buying power through the use of central buying were two reasons given by Asa Briggs for the continued growth of department stores in the 1930s. He also suggested that other important issues were the requirement for little borrowing from the financial markets, and the extension of service departments attached to the stores.[221] All of these features can be identified in the Partnership at this time.[222] Although the JLP's involvement with the financial markets had little direct impact on the recruitment and employment of middle-class women, other

[220] This form of recruitment is discussed in Quail, J., 'From Personal Patronage to Public School Privilege', in Kidd, A. and Nicholls, D. (eds.), *The Making of the British Middle Class?*, Stroud, Sutton, 1998, ps169-185.

[221] Briggs, A., *Friends of the People*. *The Centenary History of Lewis's, etc.,* London, Batsford, 1956, p169.

[222] Minutes, Committee for Policy and Finance, 1938, A241/4, in JLP Archive. For example, see the creation of a new livestock department in Peter Jones in the 1930s.

factors, such as the establishment of new service departments, centralised buying and provincial expansion all influenced the progress made by these women.

Lancaster has described the extensive acquisition policies of the JLP and other department store owners in the 1920s and 30s. He comments:

> Lewis was as aggressive as his competitors in acquiring other stores .. [he] was undoubtedly one of the most successful store owners of the twentieth century.[223]

In *Partnership For All,* JSL wrote that he had sought to purchase individual shops since 1914, but no progress was made until 1933.[224] He identified businesses which were under-performing, as a result of investment in staff and systems. He also approached those who had inherited a family business, but lacked the skill to move the trade forward.[225] These shops had small management teams, buyers were the senior managers who had been promoted from within, and there was little opportunity for promotion, particularly for women. They were not able to benefit from large scale investment or to exploit the economies of scale which were enjoyed by large department store groups such as Lewis's Ltd and the Selfridge Provincial Group.[226]

Jessops of Nottingham was the first of four provincial department stores to be acquired in the early 1930s. The shop had originally opened in 1804 and was viewed by staff and customers as very old fashioned, with the first female clerical staff and typists not introduced until after World War I.[227] In the years after 1918 trade had decreased and

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[223] Lancaster, B., *The Department Store: A Social History*, Leicester, Leicester University Press, 1995, p148.

[224] Lewis, J.S., *Partnership For All,* London, Kerr Cross, 1948, p91.

[225] An example of a shop sold by second generation owners was Peter Jones, acquired in 1905 by John Lewis. See MacPherson, (ed.), *John Spedan Lewis,* p143.

[226] Lancaster, *The Department Store*, ps85-91.

[227] *The Gazette*, 2.3.1963, p185, in JLP Archive.

standards had fallen.[228] Sales figures were very low, with turnover in 1933 only £58,598. After purchase by the JLP this increased by almost 30% the first year, and by 1935 had reached £100,000. By 1940 turnover had exceeded £198,800.[229]

This dramatic increase coincided with the Partnership's implementation of the strategies piloted in their London shops for both stock and staff. Rather than sourcing merchandise locally, JSL used his new system of Central Buyers to obtain goods at better prices.[230] It provided customers in Nottingham with items which had previously only been available in London.[231] The Partnership's stock reordering systems were implemented and costs dropped.[232] Local buying was permitted only in clothing, as the level of trade in Nottingham was thought to be less fashion orientated to that in London.[233]

These new systems were to have a profound impact on staff, particularly on managers. Despite an initial announcement that the 90 staff would be retained, the reorganisation of the selling and non-selling departments did result in a new management structure at the Nottingham shop. The Jessops staff were encouraged to accept the JLP's corporate identity.[234] Although working conditions improved and the Partnership's democratic

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[228] Ibid., 9.4.1983, ps224-5.

[229] Ibid., 23.3.1963, p186.

[230] Ibid., 9.4.1983, p225.

[231] Ibid., 23.3.1963, p186.

[232] Systems included invoice control, as listed in Committee for Criticism file, 1934, A/426/5, in JLP Archive.

[233] The level of trade in provincial stores was thought to be inferior to that of London shops. See Horwood, C., *Keeping Up Appearances: Fashion and Class Between the Wars,* London, Sutton, 2005, ps10-28. See also Jefferys, J., *Retail Trading in Britain, 1850-1950,* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1954, p346.

[234] *The Gazette,* 29.4.1933, p224, in JLP Archive.

council system was introduced in an attempt to stabilise and increase the loyalty of the workforce, there was a resistance to change and staff continued to leave.[235]

Several JLP managers, including a Local Staff Adviser, Mrs Elborough, who was in charge of staff training and Miss Hellyer, the Chief Matron, were posted to Nottingham to help ease the disruption caused by the introduction of new systems and to help staff adapt to the new working practices. [236] Within two years further branches at Southampton, Weston-Super-Mare and Southsea were acquired and the same systems were introduced. The new provincial branches were in a similarly poor condition to Jessops. Training and systems were outdated, with traditional buying, with the buyer running the shop floor as well as purchasing stock, operating in each store.[237] Staff were initially retained, but those who were unable to reach the Partnership's strict standards for dress, communication and administration were dismissed.

With the acquisition of Jessops the Partnership's expectation of the mobility of managers and the opportunities this created greatly increased.[238] Partnership managers, both male and female, were transferred into the new shops to introduce Partnership systems and culture.[239] In some cases the requirement for managers to move to these new shops placed married women managers at a disadvantage. On the other hand, young women

[235] Ibid., 26.6.1954, p17.

[236] Ibid., 29.4.1933, p224.

[237] JSL memorandum no.19508, 9.10.1934, in JLP Archive. See also p49 for job description of JLP Buyers.

[238] *The Gazette*, 29.4.1933, p217, in JLP Archive.

[239] JSL memorandum no.19651/2, 1.11.1934, in JLP Archive.

with no domestic responsibilities were able to undertake a rapid succession of moves to obtain better positions in the provincial branches.[240]

One new role, specific to the provincial branches, was that of Local Staff Adviser. These women managed the employment of the large number of new staff who were required after the JLP took over the shops. They also dealt with staff who had applied for transfer and were responsible for staff hostels, which provided living accommodation for the staff and managers who had moved to these new locations.[241] The opportunity to move for promotion was, therefore, made easier for the women managers by the knowledge that their relocation would include accommodation.

After the purchase of the four provincial stores in 1933-4 there followed a period of consolidation. The purchase of the Waitrose group of grocery shops was completed in 1937, but this division of the Company was kept separate from the department store division as the management structure of these shops and core business of the grocery trade bore little resemblance to the development of working practices within large department stores The grocery trade was very hierarchical, with staff graded according to length of service and product knowledge and was a predominantly male environment. Each small grocery outlet required minimal staffing and although there were female employees, there were no women in senior management roles in this division throughout the interwar period. [242]

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[240] Correspondence, JSL and Sieveking, L., 1930-1955 in Personal file, no date, A/2497a, in JLP Archive.

[241] The Weston-Super-Mare shop operated three living-in houses during the 1930s. One was for Buyers and heads of department, another for female staff and a third for men. Reminiscences of Miss Edney, *The Chronicle*, (Lance & Lance), 11.6.1949, A/4283/c, in JLP Archive.

[242] *The Gazette*, 3.10.1987, p824, in JLP Archive.

The Rebuilding of Peter Jones

In the 1920s Peter Jones occupied a building comprising several adjacent shops and other businesses (including a public house), which had been knocked through over a period of twenty years. This led to problems of differing floor levels, poor lighting, lack of stock mobility and limited options for display.[243] As early as 1926 plans were being circulated amongst the Directors regarding the possible redevelopment of the shop.[244]

Once the decision to rebuild the store had been taken, JSL and his directors decided there would be a need to employ more staff and junior managers to operate in the new larger premises.[245] Despite the possibility that sales would drop during the rebuilding, they chose not to dismiss any staff whilst work was underway. On the contrary, staff were retained and recruitment continued as JSL expectated that more employees would be required to cover the new shop floor and the resultant increase in trade that was expected.[246]

When the building work commenced, the selling departments were re-organised. The role of Superintendents[247] became critical because the organisation required to move departments, stock and staff was complex and demanded a much more flexible approach than had previously been the case. Former stock rooms, workrooms and non-selling areas were turned into selling space, and showrooms were constructed in the wells of the building. New facilities were built, including a new dining room for the staff, squash

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[243] See, for example, the report on lamps required to improve visibility in the Silk Department, *The Gazette*, 2.1.1932, p825, in JLP Archive.

[244] JSL memorandum no. 9024, 7.12.1926, in JLP Archive.

[245] Ibid., no. 9045, 4.5.1927.

[246] *The Gazette*, 28.10.1933, p548, in JLP Archive.

[247] The role of Superintendent is described on p58

courts and a theatre. A service building was constructed nearby, in Draycott Avenue, to house the displaced non-selling departments. The building, known as Clearings, employed over 200 staff and several of the first managers in the building were women in charge of departments such as the telephone exchange, the import department and even a chocolate factory.[248]

During the rebuilding, which was completed in 1937, 25 of the 45 Buyers listed in *The Gazette* tables were women, some of whom, including Miss Slaughter, Miss Beer and Mrs Wilenski, can be traced back to experimental engagements several years previously.[249] This indentifies some of the women who had been recruited in the 1920s who were now reaching positions of considerable responsibility and high status.

The Extension to John Lewis West House

Whilst the rebuilding was progressing at Peter Jones, the other department store owned by the Partnership, the Oxford Street shop, which comprised two buildings on Oxford Street, was also the subject of major improvement and rebuilding during this decade. Here too, this was to lead to a re-organisation of departments and a change of managerial roles within the shop. Departments were split into smaller merchandise groups and allocated new space within the building. This presented a major opportunity for women managers to apply for the newly created managerial positions, which provided them with challenges relating to aspects of retail management of which they previously had no experience. These included stock handling, display and staff management, which had previously been handled by senior managers.[250]

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[248] *The Gazette*, 7.1.1956, p2, in JLP Archive.

[249] Ibid., 24.3.1934, p169.

[250] *The Gazette*, 4.1.1936, ps1054-5, in JLP Archive.

The Development of New Departments

In the early 1930s a greater range of affordable electrical goods, sports goods and ready made clothing and accessories became available for the customers at John Lewis and Peter Jones.[251] The variety of stock was only one aspect of the increase in trade. As Briggs and Lancaster both suggest, the services offered by department stores grew dramatically.[252] By 1932 Peter Jones had opened a Beauty Parlour[253] and the store was offering such services as an estate agency, an export bureau, a ticket agency and hairdressing.[254] Lower manufacturing costs due to the mass production of garments and the availability of new fabrics such as rayon, resulted in lower prices and an increase in the volume of sales on the fashion floor, again encouraging the shop to allocate more space to a thriving merchandise group.[255] To cope with the increase in demand more staff were recruited.[256]

Between February 1931 and December 1938 the total number of permanent employees across the JLP group rose from 2313 to over 6000, although it is not possible to confirm the exact number of managers included in these figures. The Partnership's Census states

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[251] Advertising catalogues, 1916-1940, A/110 & A/118, in JLP Archive.

[252] Briggs, *Friends of the People*, p169; Lancaster, *The Department Store*, p98.

[253] *Customers Gazette*, 1932, A/100, in JLP Archive.

[254] Lewis, *Partnership For All*, p454.

[255] Newman, O. and Foster, A. (eds.), *The Value of a Pound, Prices and Incomes in Britain 1900-1993*, London, Gale Research International, 1995, p95; Jefferys, R*etail Trading in Britain*, p332. Both comment on mass production and the sale of fashion during the 1930s.

[256] *The Gazette*, 1937, in JLP Archive, records 92 new appointments in the Partnership management in 1937 alone.

that less than 1% of the total were in managerial roles, with the largest percentage of workers classed as selling staff (over 40%).[257]

The scale of the management changes created by the re-development of the shops can be identified by the increased number of Superintendents, which had risen since the creation of that post in the 1920s to around 70 positions in John Lewis and Peter Jones by the early 1930s. They now controlled the shop floor space, displaying the stock purchased by buyers who, as a result of the new centralised buying operation, were now purchasing stock for more than one branch.[258]

The names of buyers, their merchandise groups and their percentage increases/decreases in trade were recorded weekly in *The Gazette* during the period 1930 to 1950. From these figures the number of buyers, and the percentage of women who had achieved this rank has been analysed. This indicates that, although the overall number of women in this role increased, the ratio of women to men indicates a decrease from 60% in 1930 to just over 40% by April 1950 as shown in Figure 5.

[257] Census, Supplement to *The Gazette,* 1931 and 1938, in JLP Archive.

[258] Press cuttings (undated), from *Drapers' Record* 1937, on JLP centralised buying system, in Magazine, journal and newspaper articles, in cutting books, 1925-1946, A/252/1-9 f4-17, in JLP Archive.

Figure 5
Number of men and women employed as Buyers, JLP 1930 – 1950
Figures taken from results published weekly in The Gazette 1930 - 1950

Gender Discrimination

The allocation of certain jobs within the JLP department stores became more gender-specific during this period of redevelopment and acquisition.[259] This coincided with an increase in the Company's provision of more fashion-based merchandise in the extended and redesigned fashion floors. In non-selling areas the development of services also created opportunities specifically tailored to suit men or women.[260]

During the 1930s, the fashion floor became an increasingly important contributor to the profit of the company and was almost entirely staffed by women, both as sales staff and

[259] Lewis, P*artnership For All*, p216.

[260] Oral interview, Glasspole, A/Oral/Glasspole, 2003, in JLP Archive. Miss Glasspole was a hairdressing manager at various JLP stores.

managers. In this respect it reflected the experience in American department stores, where Porter Benson confirms:

> Men were generally confined to men's clothing, sporting goods, rug and appliance departments, while women sold most other items: among the few departments in which men and women sold together were silks, shoes, and men's furnishings.[261]

As discussed in Chapter 2, the increased size of the fashion floor and wider range of merchandise provided new opportunities for women to enter and gain promotion. Men were employed in the larger ticket departments, where they were able to earn higher wages through increased amounts of commission and an assumption by customers that men provided more merchandise knowledge and experience.[262] However, female managers in the JLP continued to work for salaries above the average for other women in the wider retail sector.[263]

During the 1930s the fluctuation in department location and size complicates the calculation of the number of female managers employed in the shops. It might be assumed that the trend towards the expansion of the fashion assortment would mean that the number of women managers rose by a larger proportion than their male colleagues. However, for women who had reached the level of superintendent, the number of vacancies for senior managers on the shop floor was very small. The roles into which they could seek promotion were no longer gender-specific, pitting many women shop floor managers against male candidates. By the late 1930s the continuing high turnover

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[261] Porter Benson, S., *Counter Cultures: Saleswomen, Managers and Customers in American Department Stores 1890-1940,* Illinois, Illinois University Press, 1988, p192.

[262] Ibid.

[263] Lancaster, B., *The Department Store: A Social History,* Leicester, Leicester University Press, 1995, p151.

of women managers had become apparent to JLP management, leading to a preference for the promotion of men, as it was felt they would remain in post longer.[264]

Restrictions on Promotion Opportunities for Women

Staff retention and experience were a high priority for senior management in the JLP in the inter-war period. High staff turnover continued to be a major issue both in the JLP and other large retailers, despite the economic downturn of the 1930s and the increasing availability of labour. The Partnership's Chief Staff Advisor suggested in *The Gazette* that this was a problem which affected many retailers: 'The habit of frequent change is very deeply ingrained in our trade, not only upon the side of the employers but also upon the side of our workers'.[265] The failure to convince middle-class recruits to stay and fulfil their potential as managers continued until World War II. Although figures for the proportion of men and women who left the business are not available, all anecdotal evidence would suggest that women were leaving the business at a far higher rate than their male colleagues.[266] This is supported by research in other industries, which indicates that women were a much more mobile and short-term group of workers than men.[267]

This gendered view of the particular traits associated by the JLP management with women managers and buyers put them at a disadvantage when applying for promotion to posts in which they competed with men. JSL confirmed this attitude in a memorandum

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[264] Lewis, *Partnership For All*, p216.

[265] Census, Supplement to *The Gazette*, 1931, p886, in JLP Archive.

[266] Lewis, *Partnership For All*, p216.

[267] McIvor, A., *A History of Work in Britain 1880-1950*, Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2001, ps190-191.

written to the General Secretary in 1947, where he reflected on the development of the Company:

> …experience has shown that women are very much less permanent than men. There is no way of overcoming this and in my view it should absolutely prevent the Partnership's appointing women to buyerships for which they can get enough good men.[268]

The comprehensive Census of the Partnership which was compiled in 1931 lists reasons for dismissal and resignation amongst the workforce at the JLP. This document, printed in *The Gazette,* also included a report on staffing written by the Chief Staff Advisor. The report and other statistical data recorded in *The Gazette* will provide the information for much of the analysis below.[269]

There does not appear to be a marked difference in staff turnover between Peter Jones and John Lewis, despite the different working practices which had been in operation at the Sloane Square store for over a decade. Dismissals accounted for almost 30% of the turnover of selling staff. Of Buyer and Heads of Department, which included Superintendents, the figures record 10 out of 72 leaving, either as a result of dismissal or resignation. Of these, two were dismissed, both for unsatisfactory results and poor performance. They were both aged between 30 and 40, and had over two years service. Their sex was not recorded. The rest resigned, and of these several left on marriage, one retired and the others found the work 'uncongenial'. This final reason was predictable, given that JSL had encouraged the recruitment of people who were already well established in another career but who had no experience of retail work. The management's presumption was that, if their previous ability could be sustained in the

[268] Baker, H. (ed.), *Retail Trading,* London, John Lewis Partnership, 1964, p107.

[269] Census, Supplement to *The Gazette,* 1931, in JLP Archive.

Partnership, their recruitment would be valuable. However, if they did not enjoy the retail environment, or did not show ability in their new role, they were either dismissed or placed in a post below their expectations.[270]

JSL and his directors were particularly keen to investigate the turnover of executive officials.[271] The Chief Staff Advisor viewed the retention of this group as contributing to the overall stability of the rest of the workforce:

> The efficiency and contentment of the Staff has tended to depend, not primarily on pay rates or conditions of work, but equally as much upon our skill of engaging satisfactory recruits, in providing sufficient opportunities for promotion, in keeping the staff fully occupied, that is to say avoiding the overstaffing which is liable to occur on occasion in a business of this kind, and in securing the permanence of the executive officials chiefly responsible for Staff Management.[272]

In the decade prior to this report, management had considered how to encourage experienced women to remain at work, and introduced flexible working arrangements for women managers. The term 'Intermittent Partners' was introduced to denote staff who, for personal or economic reasons could not, or would not work on a permanent contract. It was aimed at experienced women who did not wish to continue to work after marriage, but who were prepared to return for short periods, such as Christmas. This was a useful tool for management to ensure that time spent recruiting and training women, sometimes into senior positions, was not lost.

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[270] MacPherson, (ed.), *John Spedan Lewis*, p66.

[271] Executive officials in this context were those managers who reached the level of Director, or heads of major departments including Staff Advice, Intelligence, Buyers and Accountancy. See Figure 2 p50.

[272] Census, Supplement to *The Gazette*, 1931, in JLP Archive.

In a letter to the Council of Women Civil Servants in October 1930, Mrs Lewis confirmed another flexible working arrangement which was designed to retain the services of useful women.[273] Following the birth of a child women managers were entitled to take extended unpaid leave, with contributions towards any financial hardship being underwritten by the Committee For Claims. The letter also outlined other benefits for women employees. These included equal pay, a marriage gratuity, the continuing practice of engaging married women and paying women high salaries for responsible positions.[274] Mrs Lewis ended the letter by commenting that married couples were welcome and that a considerable number of married women with children were on the staff. There is no evidence of a response to this letter, although recruits from the Civil Service were recorded at this time.[275] For those women who had obtained a managerial position and wished to return to a part-time or domestic role, arrangements were made on an ad hoc basis to encourage them to remain in the business. This flexibility does not appear to have extended to male workers and presents evidence of the management's continuing attempts to retain key women workers.

Despite such efforts, two significant developments took place during the 1930s within the Company, which contributed to the lack of promotion of women managers into the more senior managerial positions. One was the unusual decision of JSL to 'die experimentally'.[276] He handed over the running of the Partnership to four of his

[273] S.B.M. Lewis, to Miss Ibberson of the Council of Women Civil Servants, in S.B.M. Lewis correspondence file, 1930-1950, 4.10.1930, A/3718, in JLP Archive.

[274] Ibid., 12.6.1937. The letter confirms that one woman earned £2000 and another £1500, with other women approaching these figures.

[275] Interview with Miller recalls recruits not only from the British but also the Indian Civil Service. In MacPherson, (ed.), *John Spedan Lewis*, p25.

[276] Interview with Baker describes JSL's plan to leave the business in the hands of his senior advisors between 1935-1938. In MacPherson, (ed.), *John Spedan Lewis,* p110.

Directors for three years and removed himself completely from the day to day running of the business. This decision coincided with a change of recruitment policy, which was to reduce the amount of time and money invested in the recruitment of women managers. The lack of impetus to continue with the Learnership Scheme may have been due to JSL's declining interest in the recruitment strategy, preferring to concentrate on other acquisitions, redevelopment and preparations for the possibility of war.[277] It could also have been his intention to distance himself from the lack of success in reducing levels of staff turnover amongst the women he had recruited as Learners.[278] During this period JSL was living in Hampshire and Mrs Lewis was combining work with domestic commitments (their three children were born between 1924 and 1929). This may have reduced her effectiveness as an advocate for the Learnership scheme.[279]

Alternatively, it is possible that JSL and the Directors concluded that, despite their continuing efforts to pay well, create career opportunities and the various inducements offered to encourage them to stay, the inability to retain women over the longer term had not resulted in high enough numbers of managers to warrant the continuation of the Learnership Scheme as a proactive recruitment drive. At this time the debate regarding the suitability of married women in management roles resurfaced.[280] JSL now appeared

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[277] Ibid., p38.

[278] The details given in the Census show the number of women recruited through the Learnership scheme had not resulted in a large number of them remaining with the Company for more than five years. A few had become senior managers but retention was lower than had been expected. Census, Supplement to *The Gazette,* 1931, p881, in JLP Archive.

[279] Lewis, *Partnership For All*, p83.

[280] Staff at all levels within the JLP had expressed concern at the recruitment of married women in the period following the end of Word War I. MacPherson, (ed.), *John Spedan Lewis,* p109.

to be less supportive to married women than had previously been the case. He commented:

> A married woman whose husband seems reasonably certain to be unable to support her and/or her children should be regarded as a married man. The desirability of the Partnership of a married woman of whom this is not true, is a matter for careful enquiry and judgement in each particular case.[281]

The decision to assess each case on its merits may have been a politically astute move by JSL to dispel any resentment caused by the employment of married women at a time of high unemployment. It may also have been another factor in the reduction in the number of women recruited at this time.

Throughout the 1930s the recruitment of outstanding female applicants continued on an informal basis, with examples of a doctor and a university lecturer amongst the appointments listed in *The Gazette* in 1934.[282] However, less than half of the new appointments published in *The Gazette* during the mid 1930s were female,[283] with the bulk of new management recruits being men from the armed services and the civil service. [284]

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[281] *The Gazette*, 24.3.1934, p181, in JLP Archive.

[282] Dr Elsie Madeley was a former doctor at the London Fever Hospital, and Mrs E Cutliffe was the first woman lecturer in Oxford University's Chemical Laboratory. The list for the following month includes Lieutenant Commander Rose, Captain Cross and Major Brammall, confirming the increase in male recruits from a military background. No further references to these individuals are recorded in the archives, suggesting their employment was short term. Ibid., 25.3.1933, p123.

[283] Appointments for all management positions were listed on the back page of each weekly edition of *The Gazette* throughout the 1930s.

[284] Interview with Miller, in MacPherson, (ed.), *John Spedan Lewis*, p38.

The promotion list included General Hogg and Sir Metford Watkins, who were both to become key figures in the Partnership's development.[285] These men were fast tracked through to more senior posts, overtaking many of the women who now occupied managerial positions. Anonymous letters were written to *The Gazette* regarding these appointments expressing similar concerns to those raised about women recruits ten years earlier. 'Wondering' asked:

> The majority of these appointments to the highest paid and most responsible positions seem to be filled by military and naval men and others who have little or no practical experience in a business house.[286]

In *The Gazett*e for 1934 a total of 84 promotions were listed. Of these, 58 were men, including 14 ex-servicemen, and 26 women. [287]

The overall picture of recruitment during the 1930s was that men were trained to take on the senior roles within the Company, while more junior roles were increasingly being made available to those women who had joined straight from school.[288]

Internal Promotion

New importance was given to internal promotion during the later 1930s. In January 1937, in *The Gazette's* review of the previous year's trading, the following statement was issued:

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[285] Biographical details of the senior members of the Partnership at this time can be found in MacPherson, (ed.), *John Spedan Lewis*, ps209-219.

[286] *The Gazette*, 10.3.1934, p126, in JLP Archive.

[287] Ibid., Index, 1934.

[288] JSL memorandum no.16866, 21.4.1933, in JLP Archive.

> The next year or two will see important developments to ensure that there is no engaging of newcomers for posts for which someone, who is already a Partner, is qualified or could be trained for a practicable cost of money and time.[289]

Later that year a new section was created within the Department of Personnel to administer this policy decision. The Promotion and Transfer Section was established to act on information reported by all departments in each shop, on vacancies which would previously have been filled by external recruits. Existing Partners were moved into these vacancies, often from lower graded positions. Within six months 130 transfers and promotions had been processed by this section.[290]

Both men and women were to benefit from the development of in-house training programmes. These programmes were set up by qualified staff trainers, including Gladys Burlton who had been recruited from Selfridges, where she had introduced training programmes for sales assistants and junior managers.[291] Initially organised through the managers of the selling departments, the staff training role was developed in the 1930s and eventually came under the umbrella of the Department of Staff Advice.[292]

The increase in the number of women promoted internally may have reflected the growing number of girls who remained at school beyond the age of fourteen, joining the Company with more advanced communication and clerical skills than management had previously found in working-class recruits.[293] These girls joined the Partnership as rank

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[289] *The Gazette*, 2.1.1937, p1230, in JLP Archive.

[290] All promotions were listed in ibid., Index, 1937.

[291] JSL memorandum no. 8140, 29.12.1926, in JLP Archive.

[292] Ibid., no. 11726, 25.3.1929.

[293] Todd, S., *Young Women, Work, and Family in England 1918-1950,* Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005, p102.

and file staff and then undertook in-house training. They were closely monitored and their promotion proved a cheaper option than the Learnership Scheme. They provided management with recruits who had been trained in the Partnership's style, and were considered suitable for junior managerial positions.[294]

Staff Management

The Chief Staff Adviser and his team of local staff advisors were to control the administration of recruitment and training in the 1930s. The department had been set up in 1929 to handle all staff matters. The central Staff Advice office was based in London, close to the Oxford Street shop, and a local Staff Advice office was set up in each branch. The Chief Staff Adviser's role was mainly to undertake the administration relating to staffing issues which resulted from the work of the Department of Personnel. Within both of these departments there was a high ratio of female managers. However, the highest position within the department was reserved for a male candidate. His deputy was one of the female Learners recruited by JSL in 1927.[295] The other members were all female, including married women.[296]

These staff included a female Staff Research Worker who maintained staff records, a Secretary for the Committee for Claims who had a welfare role, a female Shorthand Typist, two female Filing Clerks and Messengers. In each branch, the office consisted of a female Local Staff Adviser and three Deputy Local Staff Advisers.[297]

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[294] JSL memorandum no. 17268, 15.9.1933, in JLP Archive.

[295] Ibid., no. 9074, 7.5.1927.

[296] *The Gazette*, 2.11.1929, p617, in JLP Archive.

[297] Ibid., 30.3.1929, ps114-5.

Pay and conditions for these women were good and the role was popular with both internal and external applicants. When it was suggested, in 1935, that they should all be qualified nurses, more external applicants were considered. Some recruits were medically qualified and these women boosted the Partnership's medical service, which had been established in May 1930 with the employment of Miss Constance Wooley.[298] Local Staff Advisers continued to be recruited from a wide range of applicants, including existing managers and those who had experience in welfare work in other organisations.[299]

By 1934, local Staff Advice departments operated in each branch. They tracked the progress of individuals as they moved around the branches and provided a source of information on each Partner when transfer or promotion were suggested. Personal files containing recruitment, training, health records and other work related details were developed. [300]

To assist the Advisers with the recruitment of all non-management staff, an application form was implemented in 1931. This was based on tests undertaken by recruits applying to the Army Trades Board. In July 1934 recruitment and promotion of staff through the Department of Staff Advice ceased, and all recruitment was undertaken at a local level. This system was easier to administer in cases where staff were already employed, but for those recruited through such bodies as the Women's Employment Federation or through contacts with the Armed Forces, this proved more challenging.[301]

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[298] Ibid., 29.3.1980, p196.

[299] Personal file, Onions, no date, A/880/ii, in JLP Archive.

[300] All permanent staff were known as Partners from 10.4.1920, see footnote 21 p73 and also MacPherson, (ed.), *John Spedan Lewis*, p153.

[301] The Partnership had been involved with the Women's Employment Federation since the early 1930s and in 1935 Mrs Lewis joined the Executive Committee. She was

Despite it ssening role external recruitment through the Learnership scheme, Personal Connection Scheme and the introduction of a proactive scheme to recruit from the forces and civil service, continued throughout the 1930s alongside internal promotion. These diverse recruitment strategies were all used to obtain the staff the JLP needed to both serve the customers and to build up their management teams. To coordinate all the various schemes, monitor the recruits and liase with the number of branches who required new managers, a new department, the Department of Financial Advice, was established.

Department of Financial Advice

On 6 October 1934 JSL was to suggest a change to the system of recruitment, with particular reference to the role of the Department of Financial Advice. In a paper to the Chief Financial Adviser he asserted:

> Our repeated experience in the past of the ease with which experimental engaging leads to serious and plainly unnecessary loss of money ought to have led us to our setting up long ago such a scheme as I am about to suggest.[302]

He went on to describe the process of dealing with experimental appointments and ensuring those who did not prove successful were dismissed from the Company as soon as possible.

In a move that resembled the introduction of the Remuneration account, which operated in the early 1920s, the pay of these experimental appointments was kept on a separate

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replaced by Miss Hope Glen (1937) and later Mrs Barrington Ward (1938). The Federation was set up as a clearing house for information and a job placement register. See Education Committee file 1930-1950, 1935, A/3769, in JLP Archive.

[302] *The Gazette*, 6.10.1934, p824, in JLP Archive.

account from the normal staffing budgets. These recruits were no longer administered by the Department of Staff Advice. The system devolved to the Department of Financial Advice who compiled a questionnaire to be completed by the line manager and provided information on the progress of recruits shortly after they joined. This was the first time a formal assessment was carried out on individual trainees. The responses were analysed by Local Staff Advisers and the trainee was either retained and reassessed after a further period, or dismissed. Successful trainees were subject to another report and then placed on the permanent staff. The trainees' files would then be returned to the Department of Staff Advice and they would continue with their training and promotion. This system was continued and extended to include those from the traditional recruitment path who were being considered for managerial posts.[303]

Staff Trainers

Another post which was to prove a popular choice for female management recruits was tht of Staff Trainer. Although the British experience seems to have lagged behind the complex training systems which Porter Benson examines in her study of American department stores,[304] during the 1930s staff monitoring and training systems were to became increasingly important, particularly in companies which operated multiple branch trading.[305] The Partnership model initially followed the American example, employing external training companies and colleges to instruct their staff in sales techniques and

[303] JSL memorandum no.15844, 9.8.1932, in JLP Archive.

[304] Porter Benson, *Counter Cultures*, ps147-167.

[305] These include the Lewis's Ltd, Selfridge Provincial and Debenhams groups which are examined in Lancaster, *The Department Store*, ps85-93.

systems.[306] In the late 1930s the company adopted a more co-ordinated programme, organised centrally, with local managers administering staffing initiatives across the branches. This staffing strategy was to create staff trainer positions for both existing managers and those from outside the company who had experience in this field.[307] As training schemes became more widespread and mobility around the branches increased, a personal dossier was used by managers and Staff Advisers to identify those who had the skills which were required to fill particular vacant roles.[308]

Developments in Systems

To complement moves being made on the staffing side of the business, the stock assortment was also reviewed in the 1930s. As a result, the Department of Merchandise Advise was created in February 1932. This was a clerical department which was established to introduce a new set of merchandise regulations and set standards which were to be used in all stores. Once again, the mainly female clerical staff and junior managers were women, but the department head was male.[309]

The constantly changing management structure was arguably confusing and contributed to the high turnover of managers during this period. As one of the early Learners who became a senior manager, Bernard Miller, commented in an interview carried out for MacPherson's study in *John Spedan Lewis 1885-1963*:

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[306] Porter Benson, *Counter Cultures*, ps124-176.

[307] JSL memorandum no. 17582, 9.11.1933, in JLP Archive.

[308] JLP Archive retains dossiers for those who made a contribution to the JLP's democratic institutions as well as those of high management status or long service. For example, see Personal file, Onions, no date, A/880/ii, in JLP Archive.

[309] JSL memorandum no. 16718, 18.3.1933, in JLP Archive.

> The Partnership in those days was a complicated structure as far as management was concerned. Management was a difficult job. It's even more difficult now but at least we can recognise the burdens and provide for them to be carried. But in those days they were all carried by people in management. So that was an additional factor in making many people leave.[310]

Staffing at all levels was constantly being readjusted to compensate for the acquisition of new stores. However, levels of overall turnover remaining high despite the efforts of management to come up with new solutions through improved working practices, higher wages and the opportunity for increased promotion. Young female clerical workers, and to a lesser extent sales staff and junior managers, continued to enter and leave the JLP to obtain better or alternative forms of employment. This exerted pressure on management almost to the same extent as management pressurised their staff to conform to their strict rules, regulations and hierarchy.[311] The Company was forced to pursue a continuous recruitment programme to ensure the increased staffing requirements, particularly in departments such as fashion, and to maintain an appropriate level of service. Recruitment practices which had been operating for many years but had failed to deliver a large number of top quality managers were discarded in favour of more traditional forms of recruitment, using personal connection in a similar way to the experience of other industries.

Staff management and training were key features of the development of department stores in the 1930s and women played an important part in these departments, although they still failed to reach management positions of the highest status. Their roles were to

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[310] Miller, quoted in MacPherson, (ed.), *John Spedan Lewis*, p31.

[311] The power of young female workers in specific sectors, including retail work, is discussed in Todd, *Young Women, Work and Family in England*, ps145-147.

develop further during and after the Second World War, when the call-up of many senior male managers finally created opportunities for women to finally move to the top levels on the shop floor. These opportunities will be explored in the final chapter of this thesis.

CHAPTER FOUR

Change Management 1940-1950

The acquisition of 15 department stores purchased from the Selfridge organisation in 1940,[312] will be discussed in this chapter, and had significant implications for female managers from both the JLP and the Selfridge Provincial Stores [SPS]. The purchase of the SPS group was to create one of the largest retail groups in the country. With a turnover of £6.3million and over 10,000 staff in 21 department stores, it presented women employees with many opportunities during the challenging market conditions experienced by retailers in the 1940s.[313]

The staffing and promotion issues created by the takeover, as the company doubled in size overnight required a major re-assessment of the policies and strategies, which was to affect those in managerial positions within both existing and new branches. The timing of the takeover, during the first year of World War II, once more increased the need for recruitment, as many male managers and other men in the labour market returned to active duty. This created vacancies for women in both junior and senior roles across the Partnership. The development of these roles, and the women's ability to maintain their positions during the five year period after 1945, will be examined.

Two key positions which developed during the 1940s, and which continued to be a source of employment for educated women into the next century, will be analysed. The

[312] During the 1920s and 1930 Gordon Selfridge acquired department stores from across the country, which were formed into the Selfridge Provincial [SPS] group in 1926. They were sold to the JLP in January 1940. MacPherson, H. (ed.), *John Spedan Lewis 1885-1963*, London, John Lewis Partnership, 1985, ps166-170.

[313] Lancaster, B., *The Department Store: A Social History*, Leicester, Leicester University Press, 1995, p195.

first, the job of Registrar, grew out of a clerical function to administer and support the democratic arrangements of the Partnership. This role was set up in each store and was only offered to older, educated women. The second major position was the provision in each shop of a Staff Trainer, another role almost exclusively held by women. Trainers were employed to develop the internal candidates for promotion who became increasingly important to the management structure of the Partnership in the years after World War II.

This chapter will examine the degrees of importance attached by the JLP to the age and experience, as much as the class or gender, of those considered suitable for the most senior positions. It will then consider whether these women were able to retain their position and status within the Partnership after 1945.

The Acquisition of the Selfridge Provincial Group

In January 1940, *The Gazette* announced to the JLP staff that the Partnership had acquired the 15 department stores which comprised the Selfridge Provincial Group. The group had been built up over the preceding decade by H Gordon Selfridge across England. The cost of this venture was less than £40,000. It was described by JSL as a small amount of money for a large capital investment which, despite the drawbacks of the war, presented a great opportunity to the business:

> Even in a time of assured peace and pretty good trade it would be a tough job to take on at one time so many different businesses, scattered so widely, of such different characters, that is to say, class of trade and so on, and with such a history. Obviously it must be a vastly tougher job in time of war. Especially at this early stage, when the uncertainties of every sort are so great and goods, already scarce, seem certain to become, who shall say how scarce? And who

> shall say for how long? But this may turn out to have been a great chance. Great chances come only rarely and, when they do, it is apt to be at a time that is inconvenient.[314]

In the article he explained the reasons for the takeover. These included the possibility that trade in the capital might decrease due to traffic problems, that air raids might damage the central London stores, the provision of a wider geographical customer base, the ability to increase buying power through a larger central buying system, the opportunity to select suitable candidates for promotion from a larger pool of talent and more opportunities to offer those suitable candidates positions of greater responsibility.[315] The last three reasons indicate the continuing desire to provide new opportunities for managers and recruits. As JSL predicted, the years following this acquisition were to provide a chance for women managers to enter senior positions.

The SPS group provided an addition to the Partnership's portfolio of shops, both in their diverse geographical locations and the ability to instigate even more economies of scale in systems such as centralised buying. The stores were exploiting systems, recruitment practices, welfare benefits and staff training initiatives similar to those being operated by the Partnership. In some cases, the organisational systems they brought with them were in advance of those being operated by the Partnership. The SPS advertising and promotional activities were well developed, with some shops providing children's Saturday clubs, exhibitions, fashion shows and Christmas grottos produced to a high standard.[316] They had comparable information media in the form of a local house

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[314] *The Gazette,* 3.2.1940, p3, in John Lewis Partnership Archive (JLP Archive), Stevenage.

[315] Ibid., p7.

[316] Publicity material. Press cuttings, Cole Brothers, Sheffield, 1938-1940, A/403/a, in JLP Archive.

magazine and welfare provision for all staff. The social amenities which most SPS stores enjoyed were very advanced for the period and were also similar to those offered by the Partnership.[317]The new store acquisitions brought a more dynamic and flamboyant attitude towards retailing to the Partnership which had, until this time, proceeded with 'understated stylishness and a lack of frivolity'.[318] However, despite the expertise of the SPS managers, there is little evidence of the Partnership fully adopting any practices which had been prevalent in the SPS shops prior to the takeover. For example, advertising budgets were abolished and stock ordering systems replaced with Partnership methods.

Another field in which SPS was more advanced, and to which both organisations attached importance, was staff training. The Partnership was developing this department during the 1930s,[319] but the mature system being offered by the SPS to their employees, delivered through specialist trainers, reflected the influence of the American system which was familiar to Gordon Selfridge.[320] This system, which combined merchandise and salesmanship training with more general educational instruction was delivered through a formal training programme. The SPS had also been actively recruiting middle-class women as managers. They immediately began to filter into the Partnership's

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[317] Lancaster, *The Department Store*, p74.

[318] Ibid., p149.

[319] In the 1920s and 30s Staff Training sessions for staff were contracted out to Gladys Burlton. *The Gazette*, 25.11.1933, p747, in JLP Archive.

[320] Porter Benson, S., *Counter Cultures: Saleswomen, Managers and Customers in American Department Stores 1890-1940*, 1985, Illinois, University of Illinois Press, 1985, p150*;* Cushman, J., 'The Customer is Always Right: Change and Continuity in British and American Department Store Salesmanship, 1945-1960', in Benson, J. and Ugolini, L. (eds.), *Cultures of Selling: Perspectives on Consumption and Society since 1700*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2006, p203.

management structure and were to contribute to the number of women who reached senior positions during the 1940s.

Staffing levels in each SPS shop remained stable after the takeover, but were to become increasingly stretched during World War II as more men left the business. More than any other expansion plan, the pressure created by the war, had a profound effect on the promotion of women managers in the Partnership over the next ten years.

The Call Up Of Senior Staff

The Partnership's pre-war policy of recruiting senior staff from the armed forces was to prove a costly mistake, as many of those who had been promoted to these important roles were amongst the first to be called back for duty. Bernard Miller, who was Director of Estimates for the Partnership from 1935-1942, commented:

> ..we'd recruited extensively from the services - the Army and Navy in particular - and of course as soon as the war broke out the whole of our management disappeared overnight'.[321]

The managers who remained were often expected to take on more than one role, whilst there was a need for a swift response to promote others into the remaining vacant positions. This provided women with the opportunity to move into senior management roles.

Staff Management

[321] MacPherson, (ed.), *John Spedan Lewis*, p38.

Staff management had proved a successful avenue for career progression for women in the 1930s, and as the jobs within this area of the business developed, new career opportunities were created in staff training departments. Located both centrally, and in each branch across the country, this role became a high profile function during the 1940s under the leadership of the Deputy Chairman, Mrs Sarah Lewis.[322]

During World War II the recruitment, training and development of managers in JLP department stores were undertaken on a more ad hoc basis than before, with little documentary evidence to support the introduction of new systems or staffing policies. New challenges faced the Partnership, including a change in senior managers, the reduction in the amount of goods available for sale in the stores[323] and the physical damage to several shops.[324] The JLP's staffing policies, adopted in the previous decade, continued relatively unchanged but there was an increased need for more geographical mobility of managerial labour as a result of the acquisition of the SPS group of department stores.

Staff Training

In 1935 one of the Partnership's most senior managers, Metford Watkins, returned from a trip to the US convinced of the value of staff training, and was responsible for

[322] Mrs Lewis was Chairman of the Committee for Education. See Education Committee file, 1930-1950, A/287, in JLP Archive.

[323] Addendum to 1940 catalogue quotes problems with supply of certain items. Advertising catalogues, 1916-1940, A/118, in JLP Archive.

[324] John Lewis Oxford Street West House was destroyed in September 1940. The East House was badly damaged during the same attack and Tyrrell & Green, Knight & Lee, Quin & Axtens and Lance & Lance were also damaged or destroyed. MacPherson, (ed.), *John Spedan Lewis,* p177.

formalising arrangements for central and local departments run by educated women, under the management of the (male) Director of Personnel.[325]

As this field developed women began to dominate the JLP staff training department, with an example being Mrs Elborough, who had been recruited as Staff Secretary in 1927.[326] The position of Staff Secretary had a high profile within the company. The work of the Secretaries included arranging talks to staff at which many senior members, such as the Partnership's Legal Adviser, Enid Rosser,[327] spoke both to managers and groups of young workers on the Partnership's legal status and other work related subjects.[328]

By 1937 a leaflet outlined the responsibilities of the Partnership's Department Managers. It emphasised the importance of training, both within the departments and by centrally run specialist training departments. The leaflet stated:

> The Department Manager is the Staff Trainer in his own department and should co-operate with the Central Staff Training Department by seeing that all new Partners attend the classes provided...[329]

From the beginning of the development of the Staff Training departments, educated women were at the forefront of this specialist area, both in the Partnership and in other

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[325] Sir Metford Watkins was recruited to the Partnership in 1926 and became Director of Research, then Director of Trading, Director of Financial Operations, Financial Adviser and Director of Maintenance and Expansion until his death in 1950. MacPherson, (ed.), *John Spedan Lewis,* p218.

[326] JSL memorandum no 9951, 9.11.1927, in JLP Archive.

[327] Miss Rosser was the Partnership's first legal advisor. She was recruited in 1933, having been one of the first women called to the Bar. She remained Legal Advisor until 1955. MacPherson, (ed.), *John Spedan Lewis,* p128.

[328] These talks were given by senior managers including the General Inspector, Directors, Social Secretary and various Buyers. Staff training report, 1938-1939, A/4118/q, in JLP Archive.

[329] 'Responsibilities of Department Managers and Superintendents', Staff training report, 1937-1939, A/4118/q, in JLP Archive.

organisations. Staff trainers required many of the qualities which were normally associated with the teaching profession, one of the major employers of middle-class women throughout the interwar period. The report produced by the Central Training Department of the Partnership to cover the period February 1938-January 1939 confirms that the Staff Trainers at all provincial department stores were women, and all the staff in the central department were also female.[330]

The quality and experience brought by many of the former SPS employees in the field of staff training was amalgamated with the Partnership's existing training programme. Women with experience of running staff training departments in other department stores were also encouraged to join the Partnership.[331] Further developments, including the creation of the Partnership's own residential college, albeit for a short term only, immediately after the end of World War II, were to extend the role of trainers beyond the remit of this post.[332] However, the role of Head of the College, and similarly Personnel, were seen as senior level appointments that required a professional qualification. No women were appointed to these senior roles until after the period being studied in this research.

The Registry System

[330] Ibid.

[331] Ibid. Miss Warren joined the Partnership as Staff Trainer with three years of experience in a similar role at Owen Owen Ltd., Liverpool.

[332] Dial Close, the Partnership's College, opened in 1946. The college ran until 1948, when its closure was forced by the ill health of Reginald Jones, Warden. *The Gazette*, 28.7.1945, p295, in JLP Archive.

During the 1930s the department of Staff Advice had been created to offer help on all staffing matters to managers and buyers (see Chapter 3). This administrative department operated alongside that of the Goodwill Director (male) and Goodwill Secretaries (female), whose role included providing information and clerical assistance to management, and ensure there was no contravention of the house rules.[333] However, the Committee for Administration, meeting in 1937, highlighted that there was no similar office responsible for the aspects of the business that involved maintenance of the Partnership's Constitution. [334]

The Constitution was, and remains, the key to the culture and ethos of the company and was considered by all senior managers and the majority of staff as fundamental to the way the business was run. A former editor of *The Gazette* described how the Partners viewed the Partnership experiment: 'There was a real Partnership spirit and the Partnership really meant something to them'.[335] JSL and the other senior figures within the company encouraged this idealistic approach to the organization, which had attracted some women recruits who were sympathetic to the idea of the Partnership ownership system. JSL viewed the integrity of the Partnership system as central to his plans for the future of the business.[336] He also thought it vital that this should be fully supported by the most intelligent and articulate managers available to the company. However, most

[333] The house rules, known as The Code, consisted of a set of printed rules and regulations relating to systems and procedures adopted in the shops, first printed in Rules and Regulations 1928, A/302, 1928, in JLP Archive.

[334]The Committee for Administration was set up in 1936 as a senior management forum which discussed any matters which related to the smooth running of the administrative function of the company. See JSL memorandum no. 23083, 1.11.1937, in JLP Archive. The Constitution of the John Lewis Partnership is reproduced in Lewis, J.S., *Partnership For All,* London, Kerr Cross, 1948, ps477-492.

[335] MacPherson, H., (ed.), *John Spedan Lewis*, p85.

[336] See, for example, Chapter 1 p33.

senior roles were viewed as being more suited to those with long service. This requirement had previously been the main obstacle for women who sought promotion. The experience over the previous thirty years had strengthened the opinion of senior management that women's employment was of a short term nature and, therefore, that senior positions such as heads of branch and senior buyers should be filled by men.[337]

To ensure that the Constitution was upheld, it was agreed that a new department, to be known as the Registry, should be introduced. This department's brief included the organization and administration of the democratic functions within the shops.[338] Its aim was to ensure that the Partnership's rules and regulations were understood and carried out.[339] JSL described them as:

> extremely helpful and much appreciated counsellors to executive officials, especially those who are more or less newcomers in their posts. Such counselling functions are, I think, a specially good field of work for women.[340]

From the outset it was recognized that Registrars were not required to spend long periods in one branch. To prevent them becoming too close to the management of the branch they were required to move to another location every three years. An added advantage of this role to management was that it enabled them to select candidates for whom long term employment was not certain as statistically this group of women experience had shown a

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[337] This position was discussed in Chapter 3 p83. See Baker, H. (ed.), *Retail Trading*, London, John Lewis Partnership, 1964, p107.

[338] The Partnership's Constitution was first printed in 1928 and contained the rules and regulations relating to the functioning both of the business side of the company and also its democratic institutions. Lewis, J. S., *Fairer Shares*, London, John Lewis Partnership, 1955, p91.

[339] Committee Minute no. 3505, Committee for Administration file, 1938, A/241/2, in JLP Archive.

[340] Lewis, *Partnership For All*, p430.

high rate of staff turnover. However, the decision to move Registrars on a regular basis did preclude women with settled family commitments and as a result most women Registrars were single, divorced or widowed.

The manager of each branch Registry was of similar status to the senior management of the shop, but was not answerable to them, retaining a direct link via the Chief Registrar to the Central Board (see Figure 1, p50).[341] This allowed managerial decisions to be reported directly back to Central Management, to ensure heads of branches adhered to the rules and acted in the best interests of the business. As such, the role was unusual, providing a direct link from the shop floor to director level as a safeguard against any unfair practices.

From their inception, Registries were run completely by women. When reflecting on what was to become a female dominated department, JSL presented a contemporary view which could be interpreted as either paternalistic or from the opposing feminist perspective:

> The Registries exist to be a nervous system. As I have said repeatedly, many a successful man owes much of his success to his wife. She could not have done his job but she may have made a great difference to the way in which he did it. He had the toughness, the ability not to worry and so on. She had more delicate perceptions, deeper insight, more imagination and perhaps in some sense more technical knowledge. She exercised no executive authority. She merely watched and gave information and counsel. But she made a great difference to his success. That is the Function of the Registries in the life of the Partnership.[342]

[341] Ibid.

[342] JSL memorandum no. 29506, 13.11.1946, in JLP Archive.

In practice there were no men involved in the day to day operation of these departments and only women were appointed to positions in Registries, despite the Committee for Administration confirming, in 1938, that The Director of Trading, who was initially in overall charge of recruiting Registrars, 'shall appoint to them whomever he shall see fit'.[343]

In other organisations a similar role to the Registry was sometimes filled by the representatives of trades unions. The Partnership did not encourage membership of trade unions, though it did not prevent anyone from joining one. JSL thought that the aim of the trade unions and that of the Partnership were similar, in that both should aim for fairness for their members and believed, therefore, that trade unionism was not required in Partnership shops.[344] The JLP's alternative system of branch and central councils with elected members representing staff had been in operation since 1916.[345] The role played by the Registrars in each branch was that of an ombudsman, arbitrating on matters relating to staff and management decisions, and reporting to the Directors any matters with implications for the wider Partnership.[346] Despite an initial limited remit, Registries became far more than simply an administrative centre and rapidly evolved to encompass

[343] Ibid. no. 23705, 14.9.1938.

[344] Lewis, *Partnership For All*, ps289-303. This issue is discussed in Schofield, M., 'An Advance in Civilisation and Possibly the Only Alternative to Communism: John Spedan Lewis and the Partnership System with Specific Reference to Peter Jones c1914-1963', unpublished BSocSc thesis, University of Manchester, 2000.

[345] The first committee representing the staff was set up by JSL in 1916. The Staff Council was established in 1918 and further development in the system took place in 1940 following the acquisition of the SPS group. Individual branch councils were set up in each store and a Central Council with representatives from each branch became one of the three principal authorities of the Partnership. See Lewis, *Partnership For All*, ps322-358.

[346] Reports from each Registrar were submitted to the Chief Registrar monthly and contained information on the social, staffing, welfare and democratic life in the branch. *The Gazette*, 25.4.1942, p137, in JLP Archive.

areas as diverse as overseeing welfare provision and the administration of the democratic aspects of the business, including council elections.[347]

The Registry system was first implemented in Peter Jones in October 1938. The organisation of the pilot scheme involved staff in the department taking responsibility for staff and customer relations work alongside the Staff Advice department. A similar department was set up at Oxford Street and both were run by Miss Barrington Ward, who was given the title of Chief Registrar.[348] The scheme was fully adopted and was announced in *The Gazette* on 27 May 1939, when the roll out of Registries across the six department store branches was announced.[349]

The Registry was intended to be an information and administration department employing women educated to a high standard, with correspondingly high wages and status. Previously, the administration of welfare benefits within the company had been undertaken by the Committee for Claims as an unpaid addition to the regular work of elected committee members.[350] This welfare role, which had been in operation since the early days of JSL's management of Peter Jones, had been a separate operation and no administrative staff were employed to administer the provision of advice or the allocation of funding.

The move to expand this informal welfare provision and to provide a department to supervise all aspects of this type of staff care was not restricted to the John Lewis

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[347] The role of Registrar was described in JSL memorandum no. 18582, 13.8.1951, in JLP Archive, reproduced in Appendix 7.

[348] Miss Barrington Ward was recruited in 1929 as an experimental appointment and was promoted to a variety of senior management posts, including Chief Registrar in September 1938. *The Gazette,* 12.8.1939, p763, in JLP Archive.

[349] *The Gazette*, 27.5.1939, p434, in JLP Archive.

[350] Ibid., 22.5.1999, p403, describes the work of this and other committees.

Partnership. Other stores, including Bainbridge of Newcastle, ran similar schemes to support staff in financial hardship.[351] Lewis's Ltd, another department store group, had set up welfare departments in their department stores over 20 years earlier, providing administrative support to managers on the shop floor in order to monitor morale and the health of their staff.[352] Lancaster found that welfare provision was a striking aspect of department store development in Britain in the interwar years, surpassing similar initiatives in other industries.[353] The JLP's separation of the recruitment and training functions from welfare provision appears to differ from the American approach, where welfare departments had been in operation alongside personnel for over 20 years. Porter Benson explained that between 1900 and 1920, welfare work flourished as a separate department, but was to merge with personnel work in the 1920s.[354]

By 1940 educated women were either being promoted from other posts within the Company or recruited directly into the newly created role of Registrar in all branches around the country, as the amount of work increased after the acquisition of the 15 Selfridge Provincial Stores. Another outcome of the increase in size of the company was the need for local house magazines to supplement the news and information formerly passed to Partners through *The Gazette*. By 1945 Registrars were editing the new weekly local *Chronicle*s. Each edition contained an anonymous letters page, which had been a feature of *The Gazette* since 1918. The protection of the anonymity of all writers to the pages of the Partnership's publications was strictly upheld. This was another reason for

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[351] Bainbridge ran a Benevolent Society which provided funding for those staff with financial or ill health problems. See Welfare file, (Bainbridge), 1920-1953, A/2159/a, in JLP Archive.

[352] Briggs, A., *Friends of the People*. *The Centenary History of Lewis's, etc.,* London, Batsford, 1956, p156.

[353] Lancaster, *The Department Store,* p145.

[354] Porter Benson, *Counter Cultures,* ps142-3.

the requirement that the Registrars should not be directly responsible to the branch management, who might have wished to know the source of complaints and comments. Despite their high status, the Registrars did not have any executive power. Their role was to provide information and to be available for consultation on any matter which affected the management and efficiency of the shop. They could not recruit or dismiss any staff, apart from those directly under their control. They had no influence over any trading matters such as stock, display or systems, unless they directly affected the staff involved in these areas, yet they were paid more than most shop floor managers. The role of Registrar was initially misunderstood by existing managers, who failed to appreciate the status and importance attached to it by JSL and other directors. In *The Gazette* of 24 June 1939 JSL responded to questions raised at a dinner-conference regarding their role and confirmed that they had more than a simple clerical function. He said:

> I am told that this has been understood to mean that the whole of the work of the Registrars will be really merely secretarial and more or less dull. That view is quite false. It arises from a misunderstanding of what organisation really is.[355]

The Role of Chief Registrar

In 1939 the role of head of the Registry departments was created, carrying director- level status. In a memorandum to the Chief Registrar regarding recruitment and promotion into the department, in June the following year, JSL wrote:

> Whether the Partnership will find it possible to get the work done satisfactorily by a woman remains to be seen. Women of the necessary qualifications certainly exist but it may be that they will not be available regularly to the Partnership. For my part I shall be very sorry if this happens. It seems to me extremely desirable

[355] Conference Report, *The Gazette*, 24.6.1939, p561, in JLP Archive.

> that all of the Partnership's posts, that can be filled quite satisfactorily by women, shall be so filled and that this particular post is peculiarly well suited to be the most important of them.[356]

As a member of the Central Board and JSL's own inner group of advisors, known as the Conference,[357] the Chief Registrar was an important member of the central management of the Company, providing information from sources both within and outside the Partnership and reporting back from her Registrars in the branches, to ensure all the aims of the Partnership were met. The Chief Registrar was not simply concerned with financial success, but also with the promotion of the democratic bodies and systems which were created to make 'its members prosperous financially and happier in every other way'.[358]

The desire to ensure a high calibre of recruit for the position of Chief Registrar was reflected in the appointment of the first postholder, an Oxford English graduate, who had nineteen years service with the Company, and had previously been employed as a Buyer. She was temporarily succeeded by another woman, who graduated from Oxford with a first class honours degree in Politics, Philosophy and Economics and who had joined the Partnership in 1927 as a Learner.[359] The third woman to be appointed to this role in 1947

[356] JSL memorandum no. 25119, 18.6.1940, in JLP Archive.

[357] The Conference was an unofficial group of senior Partners whom JSL would consult on a variety of issues. Ibid., no. 33039, 24.1.1949.

[358] Ibid.

[359] Lewis, *Partnership For All*, p428.

was Miss Barling, a graduate from Oxford University, who was recruited at a salary of £2000 p.a.[360]

One of the main responsibilities of the Chief Registrar was the co-ordination of the Registrars in the various branches. This was undertaken by the Chief Registrar's department based in London. This small team consisted of two trained assistants, both of whom JSL suggested should command salaries of £1500 p.a. or more, and who were to assist the Chief Registrar with the routine work undertaken by the central department.[361]

Registrars

Initially most women were transferred into the Registries from other work, often in personnel or staff training. The age profile for the role excluded those who joined the Company straight from University. Only women managers from within, or those with wide-ranging experience outside the Partnership in fields as diverse as the civil service, the Auxiliary Territorial Service and teaching were considered. Some new Registrars brought with them skills they had obtained in welfare roles with other companies.[362]

One of the first local Registrars was Miss Edith Onions, who was a trained nurse and First Aid lecturer. She had been recruited as Staff Manager at Holdrons in February 1941, after previously holding positions as Matron of a girls' home and welfare supervisor for the Milk Marketing Board.[363] The following year she moved into the Registry at Holdrons, where her duties included managing an office and supervising a

[360] JSL to Barling, 26.1.1946; JSL to Shaw, London School of Economics, 11.12.1946; JSL to Garrett, Ministry of Labour, 11.12.1946. Correspondence file, 1946, A/3844, in JLP Archive.

[361] JSL to Barling, 26.1.1946. Correspondence file, 1946, A/3844, in JLP Archive.

[362] See personal file, Onions, no date, A880/ii, in JLP Archive.

[363] Ibid.

secretary and junior. She maintained the clerical records for staff at the shop, interviewed recruits, and also supervised the correspondence department and acted as the Secretary for the Committee for Claims. In September 1942 she moved to become Registrar at the larger branch of John Barnes where, later that year, she was also given the role of Acting Deputy General Manager. She then became Registrar at John Lewis in Oxford Street and in 1950, due to the ill health of Mrs McEwan, became the acting Chief Registrar, with overall responsibility for Registries in each of the 29 department stores.[364] Her career progression was accompanied by a dramatic increase in pay, with her earnings rising from £390 to £1500 p.a. over a nine year period. [365] This should been seen in the context of wages for other professional women at this time. Marley and Campion record that, in 1938, only 4% of salaried women earned in excess of £250 per annum. The pay rate put the Registrars on a level with senior civil servants and women in the professions.[366] Academic qualifications were not the only criteria considered by the Chief Registrar when appointing new women to the post. Personal attributes, character and attitudes towards work and, more importantly, adherence to the Partnership ethos were considered key requirements.

JSL stated in the Gazette of 24 June 1939: '… the Registries are (to use a phrase of the Deputy Chairman's) intended to "mother" the Managers of Divisions and any other executive officials with whom they may have to work'.[367] The use of the word 'mother' was significant, as it contributed to the exclusive recruitment of women into this position

[364] Ibid.

[365] Ibid.

[366] Marley, J. and Campion, H., 'Changes in Salaries in Great Britain, 1924-1939', *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society,* Part IV, 1940, p527.

[367] *The Gazette*, 24.6.1939, p561, in JLP Archive.

for over fifty years. This position was used to encourage the 'family' atmosphere in the branch, with the General Manager portrayed as the father of the branch and the Registrar, the mother. This ideal was supported by the decision to restrict employment as Registrars to women over 30 years of age who were thought to bring experience and life skills to the role.[368] This reflects the increasing importance given to older, more experienced women rather than a desire for the young, flexible, but less experienced women who had previously been the targets for the recruitment strategy of the company.

Pay and Prospects

A major measurement of the success of the women employed in the JLP is reflected in the level of pay they achieved and how this compared with a salary than they could expect to achieve outside the industry where, for example, a teacher could expect to earn £555 p.a. in 1945.[369] During World War II the rate of pay offered to Registrars varied depending on the size and location of the branch and the number of staff over which they were in charge. By early 1942 the pay offered to a new Registrar, Miss Williams, was £312 p.a., which reflected the restrictions on pay increases which the Partnership had implemented at the outbreak of the war.[370] The suggested salary scale for a junior Registrar was £350 p.a., and the Chief Registrar strongly advocated making up this difference with retrospective payments to Miss Williams after the war.[371]

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[368] Chief Registrar memorandum CH/R1952 to JSL14.10.1942, A/1039/a, in JLP Archive.

[369] Newman, O. and Foster A. (eds.), *The Value of a Pound, Prices and Incomes in Britain 1900-1993*, London, Gale Research International, 1995, p101.

[370] Report of introduction of 5% wages cut, *The Gazette*, 25.3.1939, p197, in JLP Archive.

[371] Chief Registrar memorandum no.1952, 14.10.1942, A/1039/a, in JLP Archive.

By 1943 the Registrars in the larger provincial department stores (Bon Marche, Jessops, John Barnes, John Lewis, Holdrons and Cole Brothers) were paid between £364 and £500 p.a.[372] The women in these positions had been working for the company for 2 to 13 years. The increase reflected the development of the work undertaken by Registries during this period, with the absorption of the SPS group requiring more information and administrative support to more branches.

By 1946 there were 27 separate Registries employing 90 staff, including one department which took specific responsibility for all senior managers. JSL wrote to the Deputy Chairman suggesting that the more important Registrars should be earning between £800 and £1200 p.a.[373] However, in practice some Registrars, including Miss King of Holdrons, continued to earn £500 p.a. or less.[374] There is no documentary evidence to confirm why this discrepancy occurred, but it appears from later memoranda that the pay depended more on location and size of branch and personal experience than a regulated pay scale for this particular position and also was affected by the tough trading conditions experienced by the Company at this time.[375]

A schedule of pay rates had been formally adopted in 1947 and by 1949 JSL indicated he was prepared to pay Registrars between £700 - £800 p.a., but the continuing problem of reduced sales and lower profits in the later 1940s led to a degree of retrenchment across

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[372] List of salaries in Chief Registrar memoranda, chronological sequence, 1942-1943, A/1039/a, in JLP Archive. The highest salary (to Miss Onions at John Barnes) reflects the additional responsibility of Deputy General Manager. This compares with the average earnings of a teacher in 1940 of £480 p.a., rising to £555 p.a. in 1945. See; Partington, G., *Women Teachers in the Twentieth Century in England and Wales,* London, Noel Douglas, 1976.

[373] JSL memorandum no. 29506, 13.11.1946, in JLP Archive.

[374] Ibid. no. 29549, 18.11.1946.

[375] See comments on JLP pay structure in Lancaster, *The Department Store*, p152.

all parts of the business. By 1951 there was still a discrepancy between his earlier suggested rates and those actually paid to Registrars across the company. Registrars' pay continued to be linked to the size of the branch in which they operated and branches were divided into groups A-F as shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6 – Salary Structure for Registrars by group. See JSL memo 18476, 6.7.1951

Group	Staff population	Salary range £ per annum
A	Over 1000	To a maximum of 1200
B	800 - 1000	To a maximum of 800
C	600 - 800	600-700
D	350 - 600	500 -600
E	250 - 350	450 - 500
F	150 - 250	To a maximum of 400

In a memorandum from JSL the Chief Registrar had been instructed to find savings of around £10,000 from her budget, mainly in the form of reduced staffing levels.[376] Despite this directive no redundancies appears to have taken place, with staff costs being limited by controlling pay rates rather than reducing staff numbers in Registries. This may be explained following a period of reflection by JSL which led him to comment on the value he placed on the role they performed. A memo of 1951 begins with the following:

> In dealing with the Registries we must not lose sight of the fundamental idea from which these posts arose, namely that there should be in every branch of more than

[376] Ibid. no. 33959, 20.10.1949, in JLP Archive.

> a certain size a woman of the level of culture that amounts to really good breeding and of adequate energy and force of character.[377]

The Registry system was considered so valuable as a tool for carrying out information gathering, counselling and the administration of the democratic bodies of the Company, that JSL insisted in 1949 that it 'must not be dropped'.[378] To ensure it was usefully employed, its role was extended to include more work on the executive side of the business, becoming more involved in the day to day running of the shops and undertaking roles which had been previously been the responsibility of clerical staff from departments such as personnel. JSL wrote:

> I cannot agree that the Partnership shall abandon to any serious extent the aim of having at suitable points throughout its organisation well-educated, conscientious women of sufficient ability as advisors and informants for the Executive side and holders of a general watching brief for the central Management but I am willing that for a time those women shall themselves have substantial executive functions of a simple routine kind.[379]

Geographical Mobility of Registrars

Registrars were required to move branches every three years. This rule did not apply to the subordinate staff in the department, but was introduced to ensure that no Registrar formed a close relationship with the management of the branch in which they worked. It was thought this would compromise their impartial status and encourage them to:

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[377] Ibid. no. 35254, 16.3.1951.

[378] Ibid. no.33959, 20.10.1949.

[379] Ibid. no.33959, 20.10.1949.

be insufficiently representative of the Central Management and too much of one mind with the Local Management as against the Central.[380]

To ensure that this impartiality was not compromised and that the better Registrars circulated around the larger branches, a circuit system was introduced. Circuit 1 allowed Registrars earning between £700-£800 p.a. to move around any of the largest branches on a three year cycle. These branches were: John Lewis (East and West), Peter Jones, Chadwickham and Central,[381] G H Lee, John Barnes, Cole Brothers and the Silk Shops. Circuit 2, whose Registrars earned between £500 - £700 p.a. included Jessops, Lance & Lance, Robert Sayle, Knight & Lee, Tyrrell & Green, Blinkhorn, Bon Marche, Buckleys, A H Bull, Caleys, Factories, Clearings warehouse, Waitrose, Pratts and Jones Brothers. The third Circuit, whose Registrars earning power was limited to between £450 and £550 p.a., covered branches with fewer than 160 staff, and included the Central Supplies Depot, John Lewis Building, Trewins, Peterborough and Vinalls.[382]

The requirement for a flexible and mobile female manager placed limitations on the type of women recruited as Registrars. Not only were they required to be well educated and experienced, but they would also be called upon to move across the country every three years and not return to the same branch within a six year period. Married women in particular found this a very restrictive practice and most women who became Registrars were either single, divorced or widowed.[383]

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[380] Ibid. no. 36867, 11.12.1951.

[381] Chadwickham and Central were the administrative offices including the buying offices and centralised accountancy functions.

[382] Chief Registrar memorandum no. 18733, 28.9.1951 in Chief Registrar memoranda, chronological sequence, 1942-1951, A/1039/a in JLP Archive.

[383] Ibid. no.17745, 4.12.1950.

Despite the requirement for geographical mobility, the fact that women might be, or would at some time later, be married was not seen as a reason for rejecting a suitable candidate. In a letter to Miss Elizabeth Barling, who was to take over the role of Chief Registrar in 1947, Spedan Lewis wrote:

> ... If you should marry, the Partnership would be anxious that that should make no more difference, than might be unavoidable, to your own career. But the variety of our requirements and the elasticity of our methods would enable us to use your help on almost any scale from full-time attendance to an hour or two at, say, monthly meetings of some committee.[384]

Some women found that the opportunity to move was a positive benefit of working for the JLP. One example was Miss Louise Sieveking, who had been recruited as a Learner in 1922, and went on to work for the Partnership in the company's Paris and Vienna offices. After a period working for the Foreign Office she returned to the Partnership and trained in Registry work at Bon Marche in Brixton before moving to become the Cambridge Registrar in 1950. Her later correspondence with JSL indicated the enjoyment she obtained from the opportunity offered by the company to travel and live abroad.[385]

Status and authority was a key feature of the role of Registrar. However, despite this there was little possibility of promotion from this position to any other senior post within the branch. Registrars did have the opportunity to move to another branch, but the role in each was similar and opportunities, even for horizontal movement back into critical roles such as buyer or shop manager, were limited. Once more war time created opportunities

[384] JSL to Barling, 26.11.1946. Correspondence file, 1946, A/3844, in JLP Archive.

[385] Correspondence between JSL and Sieveking. Staff correspondence files, 1928-1950, A/3856, in JLP Archive.

for some women to combine the role of Registrar with that of General Manager of the department store in which they were based. However, these dual roles were only temporary and arose through the requirement to replace male staff lost through war service.[386]

General Managers, Divisional Managers and Section Managers

Before the outbreak of World War II no women were recorded as holding the position of head of any department store within the Partnership. Although some women, including Laura Bowen, had risen to the position of General Manager in Peter Jones in the 1920s, this position did not hold the status the role was later to command. At that time the General Manager was one of a group of senior managers who were responsible for the day to day running of the administrative and service departments of the store, answerable to the Managing Director.[387]

In the late 1930s the head of each branch was given the title of General Manager.[388] Below this level, Divisional Managers were appointed in the largest branches, John Lewis East House, John Lewis West House and Peter Jones, where they were responsible for various groups of departments. These Divisional Managers were of a comparable rank to the earlier General Managers. Women were listed at this managerial level, particularly in fashion related departments such as lingerie, costumes and furs.[389] Below

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[386] *The Gazette*, 24.2.1940, ps89-90, in JLP Archive.

[387] Lewis, *Partnership For All*, p458.

[388] Lists of General Managers were published weekly. See, for example, *The Gazette*, 17.7.1943, p270, in JLP Archive.

[389] Mrs E M White was appointed Divisional Manager Fashions in John Lewis East House in 1939, at a salary of £600. File 16.9.1943, in Staff correspondence files, 1928-1950, A/2660, in JLP Archive.

them, Section Managers were responsible for smaller stock assortments in each branch and for groups of approximately twenty staff.

The first woman to appear in lists of General Managers in *The Gazette* was recorded at the small provincial branch, Knight & Lee, in 1939.[390] This coincided with the call up of senior male managers. By November 1940 the number had risen to three but two of these positions were not permanent appointments and they were all based in provincial stores.[391] The number of female General Managers reached its peak in 1945, when 9 of the 28 heads of branches were women.[392] By 1950 the number of women who retained the title was reduced to six, again all in provincial branches.[393] Over the same period there had been a corresponding rise in the number of women who had been promoted into the role of Divisional Manager. In 1939 women accounted for one third of the divisional managers, but this was to rise to almost a half by 1945 as shown in Figure 7 below.[394]

[390] Knight & Lee was acquired by the Partnership in 1934; Mrs MacDonald was given the role of Acting General Manager as a replacement for Captain Peace who was called up to the navy in October 1939. *The Gazette,* 14.10.1939, p926, in JLP Archive.

[391] *The Gazette,* 9.11.1940, p747, in JLP Archive.

[392] Ibid. 24.3.1945, p103.

[393] The branches with female heads were Caleys, Cole Brothers, Winchester, Silk Shop, John Pound and Bon Marche Brixton. *The Gazette*, 1950, in JLP Archive.

[394] Ibid. 19.8.1939, p788, and *The Gazette,* 24.3.1945, p103, in JLP Archive.

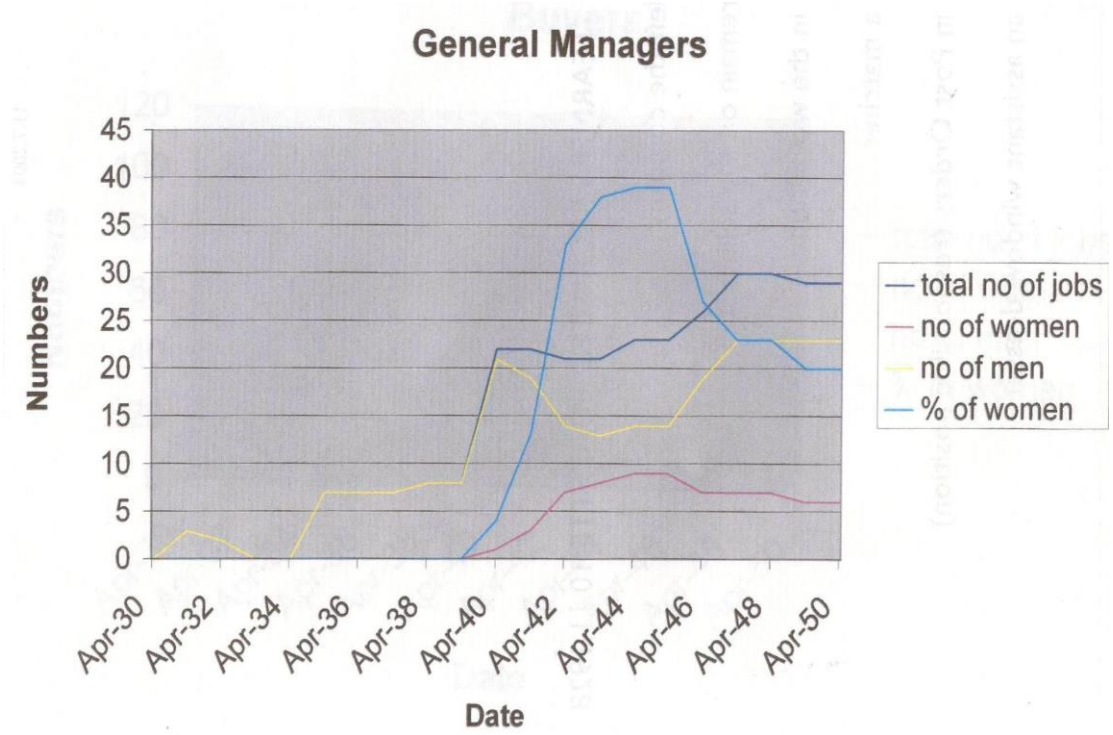

Figure 7 - Number of men and women employed as General Managers, JLP 1930–1950. Figures taken from results published weekly in The Gazette 1930 – 1950.

Junior Management Roles

The role of Section Manager, which was the first level of promotion within the Partnership, required the post holder to manage a group of approximately twenty staff. The job had been given various titles since its creation in 1919, when it was given the title Chief Assistant (see Chapter 1). Section Managers ensured the department was well stocked and displayed, and that it produced good levels of sales. This role, which was open to both men and women, was renamed again in 1940, with all section managers taking the title Department Manager, a title which is still in operation today. This name change was part of a major reorganisation which included the radical proposal that all

managers should be elected by other members of the department.[395] The idea was never pursued. The role of the department manager was seen by JSL as being of fundamental importance, providing a link between the management of the company, the rank and file staff and the customers with whom they had daily contact. After attaining junior management positions the number of jobs available at the next level, in roles such as merchandise manager, reduced dramatically. In an attempt to prevent further turnover of these junior managers who might feel their further promotion was limited, JSL was keen to reassure them that the positions they had achieved had scope and could be developed. In *The Gazette* of 15.7.1950, in response to an assertion that managerships of departments would be the extent to which most managers could hope to be promoted, JSL wrote:

> Any fairly large department affords scope for the qualities of the successful owner-manager of a small (and by this I do not mean a tiny) shop. Such a man, and with such co-operation as the Partnership can and would give him in finance and in buying and in problems of general policy, would have a very interesting life and make a middle-class, that is to say a 'professional' income. I am quite sure these posts ought to be life-appointments.[396]

The description of the manager as a man was perhaps misleading, considering the number of women who now occupied these posts. In practice, as mentioned in Chapter 2, the size of departments and the gender of its manager were dependent on the type of merchandise, the size of the shop and the manager's ability and experience. All these factors were constantly in a state of flux between 1939 and 1950, with rationing, staffing shortages

[395] This idea was proposed by JSL after reading Aldous Huxley's book *Ends & Means.* Ibid. 5.8.1939, p722.

[396] Ibid. 15.7.1950, p280.

and the physical damage to shops requiring a very flexible approach to the daily organisation of each shop.[397]

Despite the supply and staffing problems associated with the war and immediate post-war period, the fashion departments continued to provide a high level of employment for women during the decade between 1940 and 1950, both on the shop floor and in management positions.

Jefferys notes that by the end of the 1930s women's and girls' wear and drapery goods accounted for 40-50% of the turnover of department store trade.[398] The growing dominance of ready to wear fashion and fashion accessory departments in the department store at this time was reflected in the increased number of managers who were recorded in the weekly figures.[399] By the middle of 1939 two thirds of all section manager roles were filled by women.[400] In lists of section managers based in John Lewis West House alone, in 1940, there were 69 posts listed of which 43 were held by women, with five out of eight divisional managers also female.[401]

Despite women dominating management positions within the fashion departments, other areas of trade, such as carpets and furnishings, continued to be difficult for women managers to enter.[402] Women did feature in these departments as sales staff and clerical

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[397] Correspondence between JSL and Watkins, Director of Trading, Staff correspondence files, 1928-1950, A/3923/a&b, in JLP Archive.

[398] Jefferys, J., *Retail Trading in Britain, 1850-1950,* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1954, p347.

[399] Horwood, C., *Keeping up Appearances: fashion and class between the wars,* London, Sutton, 2005, p6.

[400] *The Gazette*, 22.7.1939, ps685-688, in JLP Archive.

[401] Ibid., 3.2.1940, p27.

[402] For example, see personal file, Hurrell, no date, A/531/a, in JLP Archive.

workers, but managerial roles were mainly restricted to men until the 1960s.[403] In some cases the high age profile of the male managers in these departments was above that which required them to enter the forces, leading to fewer opportunities for promotion into these roles during the 1940s.

The age profile and merchandise type had implications not only for the gender of the staffing in departments, but also contributed to the inequalities in pay which were highlighted by Lancaster in his assessment of the JLP workforce in the 1930s.[404] A decade later the difference between the salaries paid to managers in the furnishing departments and those in fashion continued to demonstrate a marked difference.[405] The older, more experienced male managers commanded higher salaries than their younger colleagues in fashion departments. This contributed to discrepancies in the wage scale between male and female managers, despite JSL's desire to ensure equal pay, which was discussed in Chapter 1.

In 1940, in John Lewis West House the only managers to receive a weekly wage of over £7 were all male, the top of the range being £8/3/4d and the bottom being £3/12/6d. The top salary for female department managers, regardless of experience or age, varied between £6/10/- and £2/7/6d.[406] This, nevertheless, exceeded the average wage of a female government worker who, six years later, in 1946, could still only expect a weekly wage of around £4.[407]

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[403] In 1967, the weekly results of each merchandise group show that no female manager was running furniture, hardware, floorcoverings or fabric departments. See *The Gazette*, 1967, in JLP Archive.

[404] Lancaster, *The Department Store*, p150-152.

[405] Pay records, 1940, A/279/2/d, in JLP Archive.

[406] Ibid.

[407] Newman and Foster (eds.), *The Value of a Pound*, p101.

During Word War II some married women who had previously been unable to work due to domestic commitments found themselves available to work when their children were evacuated or were offered places in the war time nurseries provided by the government.[408] The JLP was aware that more efforts would have to be made to ensure the continued recruitment of new managers into the Company, when the war ended and the schemes were withdrawn or reduced.[409]

In 1943, *The Gazette* reported:

> We should have to find every year about 40 new managers of departmental units, that is to say chiefs to about a dozen and two or three divisional units, that is to say chiefs of about 200, and besides these somewhere about half a dozen additional Buyers and to fill the other posts necessary to the handling of that volume of new permanent turnover.[410]

Active recruitment continued to be a priority during the 1940s, with Mrs Lewis seeking sources of labour from organisations such as the Women's Employment Federation.[411] Attempts to recruit through contacts at universities also continued to be a feature of the recruitment of women for managerial positions.[412] Despite these initiatives, the expected

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[408] Holden, K., 'Family, Caring and Unpaid Work' in Zweiniger-Bargielowska, I. (ed.), *Women in Twentieth Century Britain,* London, Pearson, 2001, p139.

[409] MacPherson, (ed.), *John Spedan Lewis*, p38.

[410] *The Gazette*, 4.9.1943, p341, in JLP Archive.

[411] Letter from Women's Employment Federation, 15.3.1935. Committee for Education correspondence, 1935-1939, A/3769, in JLP Archive.

[412] Correspondence between Sarah Lewis and Miss Long of Somerville College confirms that Miss Long acted as a 'scout' for talent for the Partnership between 1929-1947, Minutes of Education Committee, no111930, 1950, A/3763, in JLP Archive; JSL correspondence with Emeritus Professor Donald Robertson of Trinity College, Cambridge. Education, subject file, 1929-1952, A/3609, in JLP Archive.

increase in the number of women reaching and remaining in senior managerial positions did not materialise.

Apart from the women who became Chief Registrar, the only female Board members during this period were Sarah Lewis and the Partnership's Legal Adviser, Enid Locket.[413] Below this level, women had achieved senior management positions as Buyers before the First World War. However, on the shop floor women did not reach the highest positions of General Manager, equivalent to the status of the post of Buyer, until the outbreak of World War II. The wartime increase in female promotion conforms to the suggestion by Marwick and Summerfield who assert that the increased opportunities for employment for women during war time was a way of recruiting lower paid women into vacancies caused by wartime labour shortages.[414]

During the 1950s women achieved senior positions across many areas of the business including a continued presence as buyers, department managers, and in specialist roles such as staff trainers and display managers. However, there is evidence that they were not able to capitalise on the gains made during the war and overall the number of women in these positions gradually fell, retrenching back into the gender specific roles and departments which had been a feature before the war. As the graph in Figure 5, p82, indicates, the percentage of women buyers at the end of the period of this study was at a lower level than in 1930. In Figure 7, p125, the number of women now established as General Managers, confirms the small proportion of the total number of female

[413] The biographies of Sarah Lewis and Enid Locket are recorded in MacPherson, (ed.), *John Spedan Lewis,* p209 and p213. See also Appendix 3.

[414] Marwick, A., *Britain in a Century of Total War: War Peace and Social Change 1900-1967,* London, MacMillan, 1968; Summerfield, P., *Women Workers in the Second World War,* London, Routledge, 1989, both assert that women were paid less than men for an equivalent post under war time conditions.

employees in this role. The evidence from this analysis will contribute to the overall conclusions which will be discussed below.

CONCLUSION

The aims of this thesis were to explore the career opportunities open to educated middle-class women in the JLP between 1918 and 1950, and assess to what extent the strategies adopted by the Company enabled them to obtain and then maintain positions of high pay and status. This was initially undertaken by considering why new management positions were created and what systems and policies were developed to support recruitment and promotion of women into these new posts. The thesis then considered why women chose to work in this environment, in the context of the growth of the company during the period between 1918 and 1950. The research also analysed the way they were perceived by senior managers and the rest of the workforce with reference to their class, gender, age and education.

The Decision to Recruit

One of the major factors affecting the JLP's commitment to recruiting educated women was the increased pressure on shops to evolve new systems and working practices which would ensure they became more efficient and remained profitable during a period of economic uncertainty. This required managers who could organise and deliver these systems, who could learn quickly and adapt to change. One strategy, which was first adopted in the 1920s, was the radical reorganisation of the management structure of the JLP's shops, the John Lewis department store in Oxford Street and Peter Jones in Sloane Square. Over the next thirty years these changes, explored in the first three chapters, dramatically increased the opportunities for promotion for women into managerial

positions as new shops were acquired and new departments opened. How these changes affected the long term development during World War II and beyond were identified in Chapter 4, which showed there was a small increase in the number of women within the JLP's senior management, and a larger increase in the number of managerial positions held by women in specialist departments and at more junior levels. Those who did achieve management status within the JLP, particularly in the period shortly after World War I, displayed a clear educational and social profile. Between 1914 and 1930 the traditional working-class recruits were replaced by those from a more middle-class background.

In the years immediately following World War I male retail workers were able to access a wider employment market as women were encouraged to return to the home.[415] Some men with management skills moved from their original employment within retail to work in industry and business rather than the retail sector, and retailers found themselves with few experienced male staff returning to their shops. This, coupled with an expansion in the complexity and increasing size of the assortment of merchandise on offer in the shops, created vacancies which the company filled with women who were entering the job market, either after higher education, or after being expelled from managerial roles which were being taken by ex-servicemen. This created a pool of female job seekers, whose calibre, in many cases, exceeded that of men looking for a career as managers in the department store sector.

As JSL pointed out in 1948 in his book *Partnership For All,* 'Men are on the whole to be preferred to women for posts in which long tenure is really important…. I think, men

[415] Beddoe, D., *Back to Home and Duty, Women Between the Wars 1918-1939,* London, Pandora, 1989, p88.

much better than women, [sic] though the much greater competition for able men will often make a woman the better choice'.[416]

The JLP was keen to develop a high-class trade, which required a shift in the calibre of staff employed at Peter Jones and later, the other Partnership stores. To attract what the Company considered the appropriate type of recruit to achieve this, the JLP developed training, opportunities for promotion and other incentives including bonuses, access to a country club and good social facilities which were particularly aimed at middle-class staff.

The women who joined the JLP after 1918 were to benefit from these opportunities. However, this recruitment strategy did not continue throughout the interwar period, when, in the 1930s, the recruitment and promotion of an increasing number of senior male managers resulted in a corresponding reduction in the recruitment of educated women. It has been suggested in Chapter 3 that several factors played a part in this change of policy. Perhaps the most significant of these was the increased availability of both male applicants (for more senior management roles), and girls who had continued their education beyond elementary level (who were considered suitable to train for junior management roles), but who initially commanded lower salaries than the women recruited as Learners.

Post 1950 the company's employment strategy returned to the recruitment patterns of the early years of the century, with an increasing emphasis being placed on internal promotion and the recruitment of male managers. It is also possible to identify the group of women who achieved high status as those who were more mature, in age and work experience, as well as those who were mobile and who developed specialist skills.

[416] Lewis, J. S., *Partnership For All*, London, Kerr Cross, 1948, p216.

The Decision to Apply

This research has identified three distinct groups of women who saw the Learnership Scheme as an option for providing them with employment at a time when the female employment market was shrinking. The first of these were older women who were looking for a long term career, had often worked as managers in other fields before they joined the Company, and appreciated the benefits and promotion opportunities they found in the JLP. They obtained positions as Buyers, Staff Trainers, Staff Managers and Registrars, all of which have been considered in this thesis. This pattern conforms to Woodward's findings, who suggested that employment patterns relate to age as well as gender.[417]

The second group was composed of young, mobile and inexperienced women who joined the Company intending to work on a short-term basis. This group of younger women, including many who had participated in higher education, found it difficult to obtain employment elsewhere due to the limited range of jobs open to educated women. They experienced restrictions both in the opportunities for them to train for the professions, and the prospect of being forced to leave employment on marriage in sectors including the Civil Service and teaching.

Chapter 1 has argued that most women entered the company with no desire to remain for a long period, but to obtain the high pay, amenities and experience the high fashion environment offered by the JLP department stores.[418] They exploited the JLP's desire to attract the 'right' type of recruit, but had little or no intention of remaining in the business in the long term. One Learner reported that she thought the Partnership were 'fools to

[417] Woodward, J., *The Saleswoman: A Study of Attitudes and Behaviour in Retail Distribution,* London, Pitman, 1960, ps50-51.

[418] Chapter 1, p35.

trust her'.[419] In view of this attitude it is unsurprising that around one quarter of the women Learners left within two years of recruitment.

A much smaller third group has also been identified in this thesis. This included those married women who were encouraged to join and work on a flexible contract, despite family responsibilities.

A key finding of this research is therefore, that overall, there is little evidence that many of these women stayed in the business in the long term.[420] The second two groups hampered the career prospects for those who did wish to undertake a long-term career in the JLP, failing to fulfil the potential JSL had identified for of the Learnership Scheme at its introduction in 1918.

The high staff turnover amongst women, both in management and non management positions, created a perception that they were seeking short-term employment, However, during the later 1920s and 1930s the women who remained, successfully moved into new junior management posts on the sales floor. They were often promoted into fashion departments, which were becoming increasingly important to the overall mix of trade within the stores. After World War I the management of these departments became more gender specific according to the stock they sold, with younger women often replacing men who had previously combined the experience and expertise of buyer with that of a shop floor manager. As these two roles were split, gender segregation became more common, usually according to merchandise type, with women managing many fashion and household related departments. Until 1939 senior positions of general management which covered a combination of departments, tended to be given to men. In such

[419] *The Gazette,* 4.2.1928, p5, in John Lewis Partnership Archive (JLP Archive), Stevenage.

[420] Chapter 1, p41.

positions of higher status or where they managed merchandise of a more technical nature,[421] men continued to dominate and this was reflected in higher pay rates than were offered to women. However, women were not excluded from these departments, provided they could display the relevant skills. The example of Florence Lorimer's role as buyer of Oriental Carpets and the development of lighting and electrical goods under the buyership of Edith Holloway, discussed in Chapter 2, demonstrates some women were able to move into these areas and achieve high status positions.

In these important roles former female Learners, managers and buyers expected and received high rates of pay, which management claimed were equal to those of their male colleagues. However, Chapter 3 demonstrated that the differing size of branches, degree of responsibility and fluid nature of department structure made it difficult to confirm whether this was the case. What is apparent is that after completing their training and progressing to managerial roles, the former Learners commanded salaries which were comparable to their male peers, and were also considerably above the average for other women in the industry.[422]

For some women, the recruitment and employment strategies of the JLP in the interwar period, presented an opportunity to move out of the family home, for others it was the chance to different areas of the country. Some enjoyed working with their friends and retaining contacts which they had established at university or through their social networks. For many the chance to work in an environment in which they could surround themselves with fashion and new technologies was attractive, whilst others were

[421] Figure 7, p125, shows a relative absence of women in senior management roles, whilst Figure 6, p119, confirms that approximately half those promoted into buyerships during this period were women.

[422] Lancaster, B., *The Department Store: A Social History*, Leicester, Leicester University Press, 1995, p151.

interested in the ideas of co-ownership which JSL was developing in his new Partnership system.

For others, working for the JLP was not so positive. Some experienced a lack of opportunities for promotion and restrictive practices in an environment which displayed both paternalism and an evangelical desire to deliver a new corporate structure. Those who failed to deliver the results expected were dismissed. The patriarchal control exerted by JSL over the business restricted personal freedoms and limited the extent to which creativity could be expressed. Mobility both within the store and across the business was expected, particularly after 1933, and this proved restrictive for those with domestic responsibilities.

Despite attempting to combat high numbers of resignations with the introduction of flexible contracts and high pay, factors influencing the continuing employment of many middle-class women recruits related more to social and external factors, such as a desire to leave work on marriage, the decision to change employer, or the choice to work for the JLP as a short term option, than a need to earn a high salary or the prospect of a long term career.

Perceptions of the Learners

The group of women Learners who remained in the JLP after their training formed a homogenous group and as such were viewed very differently from other employees by management and staff alike. In the 1920s, management, and particularly JSL, saw the women as an elite, contributing their style, intelligence and empathy to the ethos of the new 'Partnership' system. The Learners exceeded the educational standard usually found amongst the department store staff and, by the 1930s, as shown in Chapter 3, were able to demonstrate their intellectual ability in roles such as Staff Trainer and Registrar.

Management contributed to the elitism of these women by giving them contracts which entitled them to high rates of pay and fast track opportunities to managerial positions that were not open to other groups of staff. They were also encouraged to increase their earnings through the JLP's personal connection bonus system, which exploited social and familial networks to the financial benefit of both the worker and the Company.

Despite appealing to JSL's vision of creating a highly intelligent, articulate and dynamic managerial team, this positive discrimination alienated the Learners from other members of staff. As discussed in Chapter 2, the fast track system of promotion for Learners increased costs for the buyers who trained them and also resulted in resentment by existing staff who were unable to gain promotion into the few managerial positions which became available in the 1920s. Some Learners were seen as lacking the experience which had previously been a key factor in assessment for promotion. Even though some older women had previously held managerial positions elsewhere, their marital status was another reason for their failure to be fully accepted by the staff.

The low esteem in which some married Learners were held is apparent in letters to *The Gazette* in the 1930s, which highlight the continuing dissatisfaction of staff at the

management's policy of recruiting married women at a time of high unemployment.[423] What is unclear from this correspondence is whether the desire to reduce the number of married women in the JLP was due to economic pressures, or whether the status of the Learners themselves was the source of the discontent.

This dissatisfaction was compounded by the management's decision to offer married women, who achieved high managerial status, the option of flexible working to facilitate combining work with domestic commitments.

Chapter 4 discussed the policy of positive discrimination whereby these 'Intermittent Partners' worked at specific times of the year or at times which fitted with their domestic arrangements. This agreement to flexible working was not offered to any other group of workers and indicates the degree to which key women could control their contribution to the JLP, working to suit themselves, rather than the business. From a management perspective it identifies attempts to cut staff turnover and to retain the experience and abilities which would otherwise have been lost, despite the cost of the loss of goodwill created amongst the wider workforce.

Not all members of the senior management team viewed the women Learners as a key group of workers. This can be seen during the mid 1930s, when JSL adopted a lower profile within the management structure of the Company. The reduction in influence on staffing policy by both JSL and his wife, who had been instrumental in the female recruitment drive of the 1920s, was a major contributory factor to its lack of momentum as the 1930s progressed. Recruitment was devolved to JSL's close group of advisors, who were mostly men with experience of working in the armed forces. As shown in Chapter 3, these men recruited other men from a similar background and belonging to their educational and social network, therefore depriving existing female managers of the

[423] Beddoe, *Back To Home and Duty*, p54.

opportunity to move into more senior roles. They did not share JSL's commitment to the recruitment of women, using the continuing high turnover of female staff as an argument in favour of the change in employment policy.

As the Chief Staff Advisor reported in *The Gazette* of April 1932:

> …we have lost money in recent years by giving employment to ladies who professed themselves anxious to get a permanent post but who proved not to be really in earnest. As you no doubt know, there has been rather a fashion for ladies, who found themselves rather short of occupation, to go into some sort of shop sometimes merely 'for the fun of the thing' and sometimes because they had a vague notion that in a very short time they would be making a really important amount of money.[424]

Chapter 4 has shown that the outbreak of World War II forced a softening of this attitude, and the recruitment and promotion of women once again became more acceptable as male managers left to join the forces. After 1945 the trend was reversed once more, with the number of women in buying posts dropping to below the 1930 level by 1950.[425] In 1945 the company undertook a succession planning exercise, which involved a sweep of the employment market for prospective senior managers. This resulted in the recruitment of more men, rather than allowing the women who had been promoted into those posts, on a temporary basis, during World War II, to remain in post. The decision highlights the failure of the Learnership scheme to deliver a sufficient number of female managers to

[424] *The Gazette*, 30.4.1932, p189, in JLP Archive.

[425] The number of both General Managers and Buyers between 1930 and 1950 are given in Figure 5, p82 and Figure 7, p125.

take the JLP forward after 1945, with only a small number of women who achieved long term success as General Managers.

Of the new positions created, the role of Registrar, whilst initially suggesting a way for educated women to break the glass ceiling and rise into senior positions, could equally be viewed as an attempt by JSL and his Board to create attractive,yet ultimately restrictive positions into which the highest calibre women could be manoeuvred. Once in the role, their abilities as adviser to the local General Manager and as a line of communication directly to Central Management were not fully utilised as they had no executive power. Despite these reservations there was no shortage of middle-class women who wished to move into Registry work, with the possibility of achieving the highest status position of Chief Registrar, which was a Director level post.

Overall, the management of the JLP, in developing and implementing a strategy to recruit educated middle-class women for most of the interwar period, began with good intentions, but were naïve in their expectations that high pay, good conditions and flexible working arrangements would encourage women to remain in the workforce in the longer term. They failed to appreciate the continuing social pressure placed upon women to conform to a more domestic role. This research revealed that amongst the group of women recruited as part of the Learnership Scheme, the level of staff turnover remained high throughout the period 1918 to 1939. Those who left did so for a variety of reasons, often related more to their social and domestic responsibilities than their economic requirements. The fact that they were treated differently, paid more and yet still left, created a perception amongst many staff, of all ranks, that the Learnership scheme was not a sustainable answer to the issue of staff turnover and that the increased economic cost of employing and training educated middle-class recruits outweighed the value it brought to the company in terms of intellectual benefit.

However, for those women who chose to stay in the JLP during the later 1930s and 1940s, the Company provided them with a range of opportunities in specific departments, such as recruitment, training and welfare, for which they were perceived to be more suitable than men. Once established, these departments became populated by educated middle-class women. As shown in Chapter 3, female Staff Managers and Trainers became key players in defining the future staffing profile of the Company through their responsibility for the recruitment and training of new employees. Although they did not reach the highest levels of management, these women continued to dominate the staff profile in these departments for many years to come.

The group of women studied in this thesis does not conform to the image of oppressed, poorly paid employees which is all to often used to describe all retail workers. This study confirms that Lancaster's conclusion that it would be 'unimaginable to find so many women exercising so much power in any other sector of business or industry' is an accurate reflection of department store management, particularly at junior levels.[426]

On balance, this research therefore proposes a need for greater differentiation within the overall image of the female retail worker, one who was keen to explore new avenues of recruitment, who was able to colonise areas of development, demanded high rates of pay and was able to move into and out of the job market depending on personal choice. This group of women, who entered retail after attaining higher educational qualifications or managerial experience in another field, provide a significant departure from the image of retail workers as being subjected to continuing patriarchal subordination and failing to achieve their potential. For most, however, the information available for this thesis

[426] Lancaster, *The Department Store*, p176.

suggests, working at John Lewis was 'A Kind of Superior Hobby',[427] providing an experience of the workplace before returning to home and duty.

[427] Brittain, quoted in Horn, P., *Women in the 1920s*, London, Alan Sutton, 1995, p57.

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Appendix 1

Relationship between Registrars and management posts in John Lewis Partnership c1950

This chart shows the relationship between Registrars and the management structure of the JLP. It can be seen from this chart that the role of Registrar did not sit within the overall management structure of the selling branches but as an independent post with comparable status to a Head of Branch or Director of Buying. The Registrars had clear access directly to the Chairman through the Chief Registrar who was also a member of the Central Board

APPENDIX 2

Memorandum 18582, 13.8.1951 from Acting Chief Registrar M Onions to Chairman, John Spedan Lewis, as a note to be included in all local *Chronicles* (house magazines).

"The Registrar"

"The Registry system as we know it is peculiar to the Partnership and Partners may find it useful to have a short statement on the position and functions of the Registrar of the Branch.

The Registrar is appointed not by the local Management but by the Chairman or, on his behalf, by the Chief Registrar as the representative of the Central Board, and she is responsible not to the local Management but to the Chairman and to the Chief Registrar.

Rule 332 says "The relations of Registrar and General Manager shall be those of colleagues of equal status. The latter is in charge of the Branch, while the former is the representative of the Central Board"

What then are the duties of the Registrar? As her title would suggest, she keeps a Register and is the custodian of the dossiers of all Partners in her branch below the rank of Assistant General Manager. It is her responsibility to see that all papers concerning the history or progress of a Partner reach the right dossier and to ensure that no unauthorised person has access to them.

It is her duty to have, not only a thorough knowledge of the current Rules and Regulations, but so through an understanding of their interpretation and spirit that she will be able to advise all Partners who may consult her on any question arising from them.

The Registrar's duty is to be a friend, adviser and help to every Partner in the branch, from the Management to the most junior newcomer. The chief concern of the Head of the Branch whether Managing Director or General Manager, is to run the business successfully and his energies are greatly occupied in doing just that. How convenient then for him to have some independent [*word missing]* in his branch who will act as reminder and interpreter of the Partnership's Rules and Regulations; who will write *[words missing]* engagement or termination and ensure that no vital clause is omitted;

who will keep a watch on statutory orders and bring to his notice any alteration to the terms of Partners' employment required by such statutory orders.

The Registrar's functions are not, however, confined to the giving of help or advice to the Manager, for she has very real and equally important duties towards all other Partners in the Branch. She is the local representative of the Partners' Counsellor and any Partner may consult her on any reasonable question and be sure that she will do her best to advise and help wherever she can.

The Partnership's business is run for the happiness of its members and the Registrar, as the Representative of the Central Board, does much further this end by making all Partners within her field properly aware of their duties to the Partnership and their rights from it".

Appendix 3

Sarah Mary Beatrice Lewis (nee Hunter), 1890 – 1953

Educated : Winchester High School
Graduate of Somerville College Oxford (1912) – English

1912 – 1914	Teaching
1914 – 1921	Various secretarial posts Civil Service
1922	Joined John Lewis Partnership as Learner. Promoted to Boot Buyer
1923	Married John Spedan Lewis
1929 – 1953	Deputy Chairman and Director JLP

Additional roles:
Member of Appointments Board of London and Oxford Universities
Governor of Andover Grammar School
Executive Committee Member of Women's Employment Federation
Member of London Committee of the Oxford Society

Personal information:
Children – John Hunter Lewis (1924 – 1932)
Jill (1927 – 1968)
Edward (born 1932)